BEAUTY TALBOT.

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BEAUTY TALBOT.

CHAPTER I.

OUT OF BOUNDS.

NEXT morning the Beauty went as usual to work at the office where he was engaged, and Mr. Lumley went in with him, for some shopping. Mrs. Talbot stood out on the steps to see them off. She had seen her mistake, and had this morning put on many extra charms, and much sweetness. But there was a manner about the Beauty, a spiteful air of self-satisfaction and triumph, which really struck a chill to her heart; for he had used weapons not his own, and she saw

that he knew he had used them with success. This gave her a terrible presentiment for the future. But now, on this morning, she was all smiles and spirits, seeing the two gentlemen off in her little carriage, that was to take them to the railway. Just as they were driving away, a groom drove up with a letter for Mr. Talbot, which he took a look at with a peculiar smile, and saying it was "all right," drove off. She knew well whose that groom was, and was disturbed at the foolish look of pleasure on her husband's face. When alone with her daughter, the latter remarked the worn look of anxiety that came upon her, and putting her arm about her, tried hard, by embraces and caresses, to soothe her. The mother said :—

"Oh, I feel there is trouble coming,

dearest. Something that will make the rest of my life miserable, after you have left me."

"But how, dearest? Poor Beauty——"

"That woman—this is her excitement, her amusement. She thinks she has a more powerful mind than mine: she has, certainly, one more unscrupulous. She will stick at nothing, as they say——"

"But, dearest, why not approach her, meet her a quarter of the way, at least; make a friend of her?"

"Never, never. Let me die before I come to *that* humiliation. You cannot know what my life has been—one of victory and triumph. I am not going to bend to a person of her stamp. If I lose everything, I will not do it. And yet, what must I do? She has this fatal hold on us—what she has taught *him*, your

father, to say, that the families are to be connected, and that we are bound to them. Ah! that cannot be helped now."

Livy looked at her with a strange wonder, as if some new light had come upon her, then hung her head and remained silent. The day passed over in their usual occupation; evening drew on, and the hour of the train which was to bring back both gentlemen. Mrs. Talbot, in her own room, had thought over the mistake she had committed, and determined to atone for it by quite a new line of conduct. She had determined on a fresh programme, soothing and gentler, with due humouring. Some strange, unbending, stiff-necked spirit within was urging her not to yield "to that woman." Here were the bells of Livy's ponies, here were the two ladies out

on the steps, and here was only Old Dick Lumley returned by himself. They turned pale. No accident? Old Dick was a little nervous.

"Well, he *would* stay, hang him. I did my best, I assure you. He is at Starridge's Hotel for to-night. But here is his letter. Some ball he is mad to go to."

"A ball!" repeated Mrs. Talbot. The Beauty's letter ran as follows:—

"I have been begged to stay for a party to-night in Great Cumberland Street. I will be down in the morning. Please send my clothes back by the next train, and I will have some one to meet them in town."

This was the whole scrap.

"It is very absurd," said Mr. Lumley;

"as I told him, he ought to be done with balls by this time. But she asked for the invitation for him, and offered to take him in their carriage."

"She! Oh, that Mrs. Labouchere."

Mr. Lumley gave her a curious look. "He seems determined to set out on a new life. I date it from that unlucky 'Last and Lingering Smile,' which we made him sing, and sing too much of. Now to go to my room, and when I've had my little nap, I'll come in and tell you all my adventures."

But a very weary and *distrait* evening followed. The old gentleman, with the best will in the world, felt that too much was cast upon him; he was too selfish to enjoy so much hodman's labour, which was not at all encouraged with the applause it deserved. And he went to bed rather

early, and grumbling at those two homely women who had not much tact between them. This sort of *scholastic* life would not do, and, in fact, injured his health. So he would get a letter next day or so, obliging him to leave. How could he waste time keeping these two foolish people together, who hadn't the tact to disguise their "bothering" troubles. In truth, his sympathies were with that clever woman, Mrs. Labouchere, who seemed to hold a little of the precious *elixir vitæ* in her, and which he could by mere contact inhale. Sprightly, dashing people, full of spirits, seemed to furnish his frame with *ozone*. But these humdrum practices! He often, in act, described the whole scene, suppressing the name, and with much admiration pourtrayed her. "She took the bull by

the horns, gallantly drove up to the door, and faced her enemy!" No, it wouldn't do.

We now shift the scene to a large house in Great Cumberland Street, where a ball was going on. It was given by people Dick Lumley had never heard of; but he would have gladly gone there for an hour or so on the chance of meeting a friend or two. They were wealthy, "semi-decent people"—a favourite phrase of his—moneyed and fat, with "the garlic of trade about them." Their name was Mannock—the present Mr. Mannock's father had been in Birmingham, but not the son, so that they were of an order higher than Mr. Hardman, and he looked up to them accordingly. He determined to go in state, as it were, and went up to town to attend it.

The party arrived, and were announced as "Mr. Hardman, Mrs. Labouchere, Mr. Talbot!" The latter gentleman was "brought," an invitation having been procured for him. It was "ages" since he had been out in this fashion, and he now felt happy. Indeed, it was fast opening on him that he been misusing precious years of his life, living down in a mine, as it were, throwing away precious opportunities of enjoyment. The dazzling lights, the inviting air of the place, the lovely *houris*, so seemed to him, flying round to the exquisite music of the German Valse, all entranced him. Mrs. Labouchere, sitting beside him, pointed out all the "queries," found out their names, asked him his opinion of the "pretty people" present, and seemed eager to please and amuse him.

One of the old *passions* of the Beauty was valsing, a pastime he had not enjoyed for many a year.

The musicians were playing one of those new strains, so tender, so sad, so feverish, so wild, soft and enticing, which Germans alone seem to have the gift of composing for the dance, and in which, of Germans, the charming Güngl, and the almost divine Strauss, excel their countrymen. The exquisite art of such compositions is not on the surface. Those who enjoy them most, and feel their many twinkling feet floating on, obedient as to a magician's call, only know the results. In the beat and measure, the consummate masters find their account : they know the mysteries which that simple *tempo* holds in itself ; they can make it lag, or struggle to get forward, like a fiery horse champing

at his bit: then bring back their original air, winding out sadly, like some beckoning Undine, who must go home, and touchingly wooes us on. In this trifling "only a Valse," there is enshrined a world of true music, which, heard on the grand orchestras for which they were written, and led by a genius, is something to dream of. "Yes," some lisping child of vacuity will say, cordially endorsing this view, "a canter to the *Mabel*, or the *Guards* nothing approaches that!" But these and their fellows are mere tunes, and bear the same relation to one of the German masters, that an English ballad, say the Beauty's "Lingering Smile," would to one of Rossini's or Mendelssohn's songs.

Some such bewitching strain began to draw gently the Beauty's ladylike feet, as

if with a magnet. It made him see himself as in some magic glass, as he used to be years ago, floating round with some Lady Mary, the lights of the room in parallel rings, clouds under his feet, and the sweet, dying fall inviting him on to fly—fly, until he dropped. In those days he knew not fatigue or exhaustion—it was most sweet toil; the night was too short, though it began at eleven, and glided on till four, half-past four, and sometimes five: when he used to stand out under the porch, the morning, fresh and blue, his eyes blinking at the sun, the keen air making him shrink, and his throat feeling chill behind his white tie; while a glance upward showed him the windows, with the yellow light of the ball room behind—an almost absurd anachronism. These thoughts all came pouring

back on Mr. Talbot; and when the lady of the house, Mrs. Mannock ("Mrs. John Mannock at home"), stood bridling before him, asking would he not let her introduce him to a partner? he looked eagerly and wistfully at Mrs. Labouchere.

"Do go and dance—you must not be tied all night to an elderly woman like me. Do go; Mrs. Mannock will introduce you to some charming girl."

He went, and was presently flying round the room with some young girl, from whom the fact *had been concealed* that he was married—such an introduction to a professional *danseuse* being an unpardonable sin. It is like a physician's valuable time—worth so many guineas an hour to him—all thrown away; and such deceit is fruitful in tossing heads and

scornful looks. How he enjoyed it, revelled in it! He seemed to be swimming in the old sweet waters of bliss. Foote and Kenney's band—a slender extract rather—was furnishing the music. Flushed and ecstatic he returned to his friend.

"Why, we do not know a tithe of your accomplishments," she exclaimed, in what seemed to the Beauty an uncontrollable and extorted burst of admiration. "You are a charming dancer; so easy, and really graceful. I see there is none of the cavalry trot in your style."

Much pleased, the Beauty said, "Oh, I was frantic about dancing once. *They* used almost to engage *me*. But that was years ago."

"Scarcely wonderful," she said, smiling. "But why years ago? It is a most

innocent and delightful recreation. You are not old."

"Old? Oh, *that* is not the reason, I hope."

"But what other can there be? Do tell me."

"Oh, you know—being married; and Mrs. Talbot does not like——"

"I see. It always comes round, in the strangest way, to that. Luckily I am your real friend, and, as you know, admirer. But that reason would not do for others—the wicked ones, I mean. Some men of the world would say, *raison de plus*. I know my plain speaking gives me the air of hostility to your wife. But what is the need of any hypocrisy with *you?* *You* know that we dislike each other."

The Beauty looked down. "Of course

I could dance as much as I pleased, without consulting anybody; but the truth is, we have given up balls altogether."

"Why?"

"Why? I don't know. I thought it was not the thing after we were married, until our daughter came out."

"How strange, how singular. Why, look round us; even here the room is filled with married men. That good-looking young man dancing is married; so is that other. But you know all this as well as I do. No one knows the world better. These are only ideas that have been forced on you by your long seclusion in the happy valley."

"Oh, I don't know about the happy valley. Of course it was all with my own wish. Would *you*—Oh, if I thought

you would try a dance with me, Mrs. Labouchere."

He saw an eagerness in her face; her eyes were following something at the other end of the room. She was not heeding the Beauty, who was mortified.

"Why it is—it *must* be," she said.

CHAPTER II.

A QUARREL.

A SHOWY-LOOKING man, with well-coloured cheeks and good eyes, dressed in velvet collar and white waistcoat, tall, good-looking, and forward-looking too, rushed across, with a warm "My *dear* Mrs. Labouchere!"

"Colonel Fotheringham! The idea of our meeting in this place! When did you come over?"

"A few weeks ago. I was trying to find you. Do you recollect the passage out? How pleasant it was."

"It was all pleasant," she said, smiling.

"I shall have a great deal to talk to you about, so much has happened since."

"Take my arm, then, and let us go down and get something; we shall be hours telling each other our adventures."

"Delighted," she said, rising. Then to Mr. Talbot, "You must come to me again, and we shall settle all that. Ask me to go down to supper later. Don't forget."

The new comer looked down contemptuously at one so inferior in "build" and "chic," and physical strength. As he moved away, he whispered something and laughed: and an instinct that never fails on such occasions, told the Beauty that this man appearing so suddenly, disliked and contemned him. He himself was put out, annoyed at this interruption, and then felt, for the first time, a curious

sense—an uneasiness at the accustomed attention and worship being directed to any one else. Here was this lady, whose speeches, whose interest in him, whose encouragement had made up so much of his life, just as eager and interested about another! The Beauty was not a profound analyst of human motives, and could not have discovered that this might be the misty precursor of a passion known as *jealousy*. As it was, he became restless and uneasy; and, after a short delay, employed in prowling about, and looking into this room and that, found himself drawn down the stairs, seeking the friend who had left him so unceremoniously. She was hard to find, and at first he thought she had gone away; but at last he stumbled awkwardly into a sort of bower, a retired little room off the return on

the stairs, whose door was ajar, and there were the parties he sought, in a deeply confidential attitude, and an absorbed air. The gentleman looked up angrily and contemptuously at the interruption. These were evidently most near, dear, old, intimate friends: and indeed the affection of a life, and the demeanour that follows from such an affection, have often been mimicked by the delighted and exuberant outpouring of soul and heart, between some well "hacked" young ballroom maiden and her free and familiar military cavalier.

"You said you would dance or come to supper. They are all down," the Beauty said, pettishly. "Do come now."

The Colonel looked at her with an amused smile; then at Mr. Talbot. "Oh, don't think of going," he said, coolly, "I'll

take you down later myself. I won't let you crush or fluster yourself."

"Yes, Mr. Talbot, by and by."

"But you *told* me to come back."

"This gentleman does not seem to know what he wants exactly. He said something of a dance. What an idea! Then a supper."

The Beauty had not forgotten his old training.

"You will allow me to arrange this with Mrs. Labouchere, who is better acquainted with me than you are."

The other's eyes flashed; his cheeks grew red.

"As for acquaintance, I assure you I have no wish of the kind. But I think the not being able to take a hint is one of the most unfortunate infirmities of our nature."

The Beauty made no reply, and sat down next the lady, but on the other side.

"Do come," he whispered; "I shall go away if you do not, and go home. Why do you treat me in this way before that man? It is very unkind."

Mrs. Labouchere looked from one to the other, then whispered, "You *force* me to offend him—a most dangerous man: to make him my enemy. But nevertheless" (she rose, and took the Beauty's arm), "I must keep my engagements."

"Ridiculous!" the Colonel said. "Sit down again. I won't have it. You are not in earnest about this absurd dance, or going down to the dishes below, where the grunters are at work? Well, it is delightful to see such primitive rus-

ticity. This gentleman lives in the country, I am sure."

"It only concerns my friends where I live," the Beauty said, leading off his prey, flushed with triumph and excitement.

"You forced me to do that," she said, as they went away. "I must be a great friend of yours. Some way, I would not have done it for any one else; at least I thought so. But do you know I have a strange feeling towards you, Mr. Talbot. We like those whom we have advised, or even helped in a little way. Now what shall we do? I do not care for supper, though I would not say it to that man. Do you know who he is?—a terrific Don Juan—a dangerous Tartar in that way. He once boasted that he had run away with four married ladies. I am sure he secretly thinks he can add me to the list. He did

his best out at that place. But I do not admire those rough desperadoes—(swash-bucklers they call them in the plays and novels)—though many women do. He is furious at the slightest opposition, and will never forgive me for going away with you, and leaving him."

"You would not desert an old friend?" said the Beauty with devotion.

"I have very few, but I *think* you like me."

"I like and admire you," said the Beauty; "you are so clever. Everything you have told me has come out so true; every piece of advice has turned out so good for me. It fills me with wonder."

"But how foolish for myself, and, you must own, how disinterested. There are people who will never forgive me; but I am not one of those who think one ought

not to interfere. I know no such rule where there is a person I respect and like."

"Respect!" repeated the Beauty, "oh, that of course—"

"I never knew a man," she said, smiling, "that liked being told he was respected. I may not do more than respect; but I *do* respect, and like you too, for being here to-night; and, what is more, others will respect you also. Olivia, as I may call her, will look to you with more pride and also respect, now that she sees you can think, and act a little for yourself. Even my sworn enemy," she added, smiling, "will feel greater respect for you *than she even does at present.* So you see how disinterested I am. As you are to be connected with me, I feel I may take this interest in you, and give you all good advice. There is my father going away,

very impatient as usual; and there is a partner for that divine valse, just begun. Enjoy yourself, my dear Mr. Talbot, while you have youth, and, I was going to say, beauty. See how one forgets."

She went away. The Beauty remained for one more entrancing valse. Round and round he went with a charming light-footed little girl, who never pierced through his bachelor disguise. It was delicious—rapturous; the time about two A.M. At last it was over: Mrs. Mannock's guests were departing; and Mr. Talbot, who that night seemed to have drunk of the fountain of youth, and to have got back to the charming old days, had turned into the supper room to refresh himself.

"I was looking at you," said a voice at his ear. "You seem a wonderful performer—fly round like a dervish." For

a moment the Beauty thought this was a compliment, and smiled. The other was helping himself. "But when you are awkward, and come in another man's way, what does he do? Gives you a push, and elbows you off. I don't choose to have people coming in my way," he added, holding his glass in one hand, and looking steadily at the Beauty. "If they do, I give them a push, and tell them besides, that I think them weak, empty-headed puppies. And if they come in my way again, I pull their noses."

"I don't see why you should tell me this," the Beauty said, quietly. "I don't know you, and I don't care whose nose you pull."

The other laughed.

"No? You don't? Really, now?"

"No," the Beauty answered, with

spirit, "not if you boasted of running off with fifty married ladies."

They were now out in the hall, getting their coats, lighting cigars, and had then reached the door.

"What do you mean by that?" said the other, following him, and seizing his arm.

They were now at the top of the house-steps, with the usual confusion, boys shouting, carriages coming up, and crowding on each other. The Colonel caught the Beauty by his coat-sleeve.

"What speech was that you made? Repeat it."

A couple of other gentlemen, close by, listened eagerly.

"I don't know you," repeated the Beauty, a little agitated, "and don't want to. I'll not repeat anything for you."

"You miserable little creature! you woman in man's clothes! Get down out of my way, or I'll give you a lesson."

The Beauty *was* down out of his way, and walking up the street, the other following, as well as the two good-natured gentlemen, who wished to see the fun. These were men about town. One was a great friend of Old Dick Lumley, and told the whole story to that gentleman :— how the Beauty had pushed away an officer; how the latter struck at him; how there had been an unseemly scuffle, in which they had rushed up and parted the combatants. Colonel Fotheringham was a well-known figure; and the story flew about, how this dashing Lothario, Don Giovanni, Faublas, Casanova, What-not, had had a difficulty about another

lady—not a married one this time—with a gentleman named Talbot—a married gentleman. She was the widow of an officer of rank, very handsome and clever.

Mr. Talbot arrived by the evening train with a complacency of "having enjoyed himself so much." With an audacity that was wonderful in him, and which comes with rebellion unchecked, he told them boldly how Mrs. Labouchere "had got him the card." On his wife's side there was a forced air of indifference and acquiescence. She had hardly recovered the shock yet.

"You might have let us known in time; it is only politeness."

The Beauty was quite hostile—primed with a sort of pertness based on the exultation filling his little soul.

"Oh, I declare! So I can't go to a party without coming out to beg leave. I had a most delightful night of it — danced nearly the whole time."

There was silence. All seemed to be thunder-struck; yet, after all, if he did, it seemed magnifying matters rather too much.

"Well, you *are* coming out, Master Talbot," said Mr. Lumley. "He *is* cutting the apron-strings."

An indifferent jest, which contributed, in its little way, to the mischief already existing.

"Strings, Lumley! what do you mean by strings? I enjoyed myself immensely; and everybody says it is absurd shutting myself up at my age—it will be time enough ten years hence."

His wife could hardly contain herself.

"Everybody! who is your everybody? There are mischievous people who say things, and laugh at you all the time."

The Beauty smiled. This was all delightful.

"I'll take care people shan't laugh at me. There was a man there last night to whom I had to give a lesson. It is all over the town, I believe, by this."

"Tell us about that," said Mr. Lumley, eagerly. "What! a *rencontre!* Well done, Talbot. Nothing like that for giving you prestige. I declare, you are going about the thing well. Who was he?"

"Oh, a man you will have heard of—a Colonel Fotheringham."

"What! Jack Fotheringham, the wife killer!"

"The wife killer!" repeated Olivia, in alarm.

"That is, other men's wives—dreadful character; but with a certain *ton*. This is better and better; and our friend here will be a lion. I am serious. To be talked of in connection with Fotheringham is a certainty—well, a certainty of being well talked of. What was it about? Begin at the beginning."

"Oh, it was only a misunderstanding about taking some one down to supper," said the Beauty, embarrassed, and smiling a foolish smile.

"Yes; but her name! Can't you *tell* us?" said old Lumley, pettishly. These things were meat and drink to him.

"Oh, some lady he was sitting with on the stairs. Then he came out on the steps, as we were all going away, and tried to bully and hustle me; but I gave him as

much as he gave, and sent him spinning down the steps."

Livy looked at her father with great admiration. He was something of a hero to her.

"But who was she? Ah! he won't tell, sly fellow. This is what comes of letting him out by himself."

"No; I am not going to tell," said the Beauty, delighted. "I keep my secrets to myself. She was a very charming, clever person; and, I assure you, when it came to a question of choosing between this desperate lady-killer and the very unworthy person now addressing you, she paid me the compliment of not hesitating a moment, and coolly left him there. You never saw a man so taken aback. However, I gave him a lesson which he will remember."

Almost at that moment came in the post, and Old Dick Lumley had his mail of frivolous answers to frivolous questions before him — rambling communications from "dear Lady Buckstone," or even from "Old Tow Row Gunter," veteran campaigner, who was glad to tell her gaffer some scraps of news. Suddenly he called out, "Here we have it all! Hallo, Talbot; they are talking of you everywhere!"

That gentleman almost blushed.

"Ah, and you wouldn't tell us the name of the heroine. Here we have her."

"Oh, I say!" in much agitation; "don't, please. Why, you want to make a row. Just leave it."

"Oh, I understand," said Mrs. Talbot, with a trembling voice. "You need not be at the trouble of these subterfuges.

You see, with all your attempts at concealment, these things come out. I knew all the time it was that Mr. Hardman's daughter. You are very clumsy."

"Well, if it was," said the Beauty, pertly, "I suppose I can behave like a gentleman to her, as to any other lady? Yes, it *was* Mrs. Labouchere. I am most grateful to her, and am glad I was there to get the credit of the thing. She will never forget it to me, she says."

"My dear fellow," said Old Dick, "you are getting unblushing. Not going to turn out a Lothario on one's hands, I hope?"

This *mal-adroit* compliment made the Beauty simper, and move impatiently in his chair.

Mr. Lumley went away that evening, and had a sheaf of capital sketches and

anecdotes for "dear Lady Buckstone" and other friends — in return for their dinners — about "a house where I was stopping, and where a baby-faced husband was growing restive; the wife, a retired beauty, making frantic efforts to hold him. Altogether, it was growing too hot for me," said the old marauder; "and I took myself off as quick as I could."

It would have been too hot for him, or for anyone. For the foolish Mrs. Talbot, at this discovery, had lost all control and discipline. Forgetting the tactics of years, she opened on him with a bitter contempt and vituperation, speaking with a scorn and personality.

"You poor, vain, blinded creature. You don't see through all this, and take it all to yourself. You are being made a mere tool of, and, if I were to speak for

an hour here, would not believe that you are being treated as a mere foolish child. A bit of flattery about these little songs of yours would make you do anything. They have found out your weak part."

"I don't care what you say," the Beauty replied, trembling with rage; "it is all spite. And, what is more, it's not true."

"You are being taught manners, I see, in your new school."

"I have learnt some other things, too: that I have put up with all this too long; that it is very improper of you to address me in that style. I a child, indeed! You are angry that I don't remain one, as I have been. As if I couldn't go to a ball, indeed! I'll go to as many as I please, and not be brought to book by anyone for it!"

"I shall put a stop to it, then," said she. "A pretty apprenticeship I have had of it! But it has gone on too long; the best years of my life wasted away in humouring you. But you'll find a change, I tell you plainly."

CHAPTER III.

RETREATING INCH BY INCH.

An enforced truce was brought about by the arrival of a visitor—young Hardman—who entered eagerly.

"I came to tell you they are getting up a party at the Towers, and will be asking you. You will be able to come, won't you? Oh, you must!"

"I!" repeated Mrs. Talbot, scornfully. "I know we cannot; we are engaged."

"I am not, and Livy is not," said the Beauty. "How absurd all this is!"

Here Livy entered, and the young man took her aside into the window.

"I shall have to go away for a month, at least. They want you to go to them at the Towers, and I want you, too. I make a point of it. Get them to go; a great deal depends on it—more than you think, for me. You know, dearest, they must be conciliated; and yet my sister has a whole catalogue of offences, and seems to think that your family are all bound to some vendetta."

"We have no vendetta," said Mrs. Talbot, in excitement. "I would not condescend to it."

"You see," went on the young man, "all this is very painful for me; and makes my position at home most difficult. Latterly I have noticed that both my father and sister are turning against the marriage; and certainly, unless they are conciliated in some way, it is only natural."

"I shall not stoop to conciliate them in any way. Surely you know, as well as I do, what my views have been all through. I neither courted nor desired this connection. In fact, I may speak the truth to you—nothing could be more painful or odious."

"This is really getting ridiculous," the Beauty said. "It is quite proper what he says. Surely the thing is agreed to; and we must treat them with civility. I shall go, and so shall Livy. She not to dine at her future husband's house!"

"Livy will do what I wish," said her mother, with a trembling voice; "and what I think good for her. So will you, if you are wise."

The young man became very earnest.

"Now, do give way, Mrs. Talbot. I

assure you more depends on this than you think."

"I repeat it is nothing to me, or to Livy. My child has no need to be received on sufferance at any house. The time has come to speak plainly. I have discovered the plans of Mrs. Labouchere; she wishes to sow dissension in this family. She has done her best already, and succeeded, too; and——"

"Oh, mamma!" cried Livy, covering her face with her hands.

"Yes, I know it; and the world shall know it, if she doesn't take care. How dare any woman attempt to set my husband against me? Does she think I cannot see the object of her tricks and manœuvres Does she fancy——"

The Beauty drew himself up, with a very good attempt at loftiness and dignity.

"This is not the way to speak before people, and before Livy. It is not good taste, to say the least. Don't bring in my name, at all events."

"I am sure I don't understand all this," the young man said, confused. "I only tell you my ideas on the matter; and I really feel that something serious will happen for Livy and me, if it goes on."

Half-an-hour after he had left, arrived one of the Hardman great cards of invitation—a vast screen of pasteboard, splendidly engrossed.

"I shall not go, I repeat," said Mrs. Talbot.

"And I *shall* go; and I require that Livy goes too, as her father. Why should you not, after insulting that high-minded, generous woman before her own brother?

I am ashamed of it, and I will not have it; I am not going to be a cipher in my own house. Can't dine out, indeed, without leave—or take my own daughter with me!"

That miserable recrimination went on for a long time. The mother had taken up a weak position, which she could not hold; even from her daughter came an opposition, if such it could be called—an imploring of her to give way, for her sake.

"*Indeed* he is right, dearest,—a great deal may depend on this. And as for poor papa, surely you know it is nothing but his little amusement? I would stake my life he means nothing—it just amuses him, *and makes him so happy*, dearest mother. No, do not mind him. And what I fear, is, dearest, by opposing

him, you will make the thing of much more consequence than it really is. I was greatly struck by what Mr. Lumley said when he warned us of this; and he knows the world so well."

"So *you* turn against me! Well, go; do whatever you please. You and your father settle it between you. I give it all up!"

This was but a prologue to that faithful daughter's flinging her arms about the mother she so loved.

"Oh! this is dreadful!" she cried. "It is making me wretched to see you and papa going on this way! Oh, if we could only get back to our happy ways! I would die—make any sacrifice—only to see you both as you were before."

"That you will never see. I wish I could die here, rather than live in this

degradation—to be under the feet of that woman. But she holds a scourge over me. She knows what a power she has. Oh, heaven help me! That I should have lived to sink so low as this! Yes, dear, never mind; it is not your fault. Yes, I think you had better go. I give it up, and only accept it all. I am beaten!"

Livy left her, with a despairing face; but with something resolved in her heart.

The Beauty—who was rather a childish Beauty, after all—all but crowed with triumph at his victory. He was asserting. himself—showing that he was "master in his own house." Then, as usual in such cases, came self-justification. "It couldn't go on: he was not a child; not to be made a cipher of in his own house. Absurd that he couldn't go out and dine where he liked."

That evening again arrived the Hardman livery with a letter for Mr. Talbot; as usual, solemnly delivered before the family, and causing a miserable disquietude. It ran :—

"I assume that you are coming to us, and am so delighted. Mind you bring your song—or *my* song, rather, for I *invented* it, and deserve some of the glory. But there is another reason for which we wish you here. 'Will you forgive me for what I have done?' asked the poor vanquished Colonel Fotheringham. I want you to be reconciled; he too is willing, and you must be generous. He is a friend of mine, and really good; and I daresay you have guessed the reason of his temper the other night. So we must have indulgence. It will be such a pleasant reconciliation

dinner; and we shall have the pleasure of seeing conqueror and conquered, in the same room. We hope that Mrs. Talbot is coming, and *dearest* Livy."

The Beauty so simpered and smiled over this flattering testimonial, and so glowed with honest blushes, as to attract the attention of his wife and daughter.

Mrs. Talbot, beside herself, again forgot her dignity and reserve.

"Some more of that ridiculous letter-writing—to hold yourself in readiness to be exhibited as a jackal—and run of some errand!"

This was a happy opening for the Beauty. It was with an almost exquisite feeling of pleasure that he handed it over.

"You can read it, if you like."

Her first impulse was to push it back:

then to take it, and glance over it contemptuously. Her face grew serious as she read. She stopped before finishing it, and said passionately, "What gross and transparent flattery! *I* never saw such an attempt to make a fool of a person —without even taking the trouble of concealing the attempt. Certainly you are not much complimented. I congratulate you on your letter; and if I was you, I would show it to every one, as you have shown it to us."

The Beauty started up furiously.

"You must not speak this way to me. I won't have it. It's too impertinent altogether. You're very ready with your 'fools' and names, as some one said the other day. When people are fond of using it too much, they speak about what they know best."

"It is easy to guess who primes you with fine speeches; they cannot come from yourself. You have quite a parrot way with you."

"I tell you again, I won't have this."

"Oh, papa, mamma dear," said Livy, wringing her hands, "if this goes on it will kill me. What *am* I to do—what is to become of us?"

"Don't, Olivia. I request you will not speak in that way," said Mr. Talbot, with dignity. "I must assert my own position in this house, at whatever cost."

Another scene—ending with Mrs. Talbot sweeping from the room, with that savage rustle by which a silk dress exhibits passion, just as well as an oath or a burst of fury could do it.

CHAPTER IV.

ROLAND FOR OLIVER.

THE party at the Towers was plainly in honour of the marauding Shipleys—a sort of testimonial banquet. That lady and her daughter had indeed made good their ground, and carried away vast spoil from the fruit-trees, and gardens of the place. She had specially marked the head of the family for her own—would pay him visits, and consult him on trifling points in the most confidential and friendly manner. It was "My dear Mr. Hardman, tell me this, like a good creature. I look

on you as a rock of sense:" which was answered by "Really, my dear Lady Shipley:"—"And," goes on the lady, "my daughter Mony so looks up to you; and that nice son of yours, I can't tell you how she likes him. Of course, as he is to be married, and all that, I tell her it is very wrong."

"It is very flattering indeed, madam," said he, much pleased. "You do me great honour, indeed."

"Not at all. And now, my dear Mr. Hardman, just sit down, and tell me about this match, for it quite came on me by surprise. I hear those Talbots are very clever people."

"I say openly," said Mr. Hardman, with a loud voice, "I did not approve of the business. From the beginning I set my face against it. There is no money—no

connection—nothing. I wash my hands of the whole affair."

"Dear me! this is quite a new idea. *I said so to Mony.* She will tell you I said so the other morning. It was impossible, I said, that it could have the approbation of Mr. Hardman—a man who could be anything—whose son would be a match for anybody; and I'll tell you candidly what I said to her then, Mr. Hardman, for I always speak my mind, and conceal nothing—'I wish to Heaven, Mony, you had been married into such a family.'"

"Indeed, ma'am, it is very good of you to say so. I take it as a great compliment."

"Now that it is past and done for, I may speak out. I say it is a good thing to be connected with a man like you. You may be proud of yourself, and

though those Talbots, I am told, are fine upon the matter, and talking queerly."

In this way did this crafty old lady proceed to work upon the manufacturer, and sent him home in quite a rage.

This was the morning after the dinner; and the first person he met was his son.

"Where are you going, sir?"

"I was going over to see Olivia."

"Yes, and be sneered at behind your back. You don't care for that, but I do. You are a fool, and have been a fool, and always will be one."

"How, father? About this marriage?"

"Yes, sir. But I don't give my consent still. If you have no self-respect, I have. I am not going to be insulted—belled about the parish—by these snobs.

To have them sneering here, and sneering there. Then, I tell you what, I have made up my mind they shall have none of my money to sneer at. I'd sooner leave every halfpenny I have to—the Queen."

"But they don't sneer, father — at least—"

"You know that's untrue—you can't deny it, sir. It's too much, and I shan't put up with it—there."

Confounded at this new turn, the young fellow turned away bewildered. He went to his sister.

"I have always had the same opinion," she said. "Do me this justice: I have been above-board in my dislike of your new connections. Olivia is a charming girl: but her mother—well, you know, she don't like me."

"Yes, unfortunately."

"Well, papa has some reason on his side, I think, though we do not often agree. He is the head of the house; he has made all our money for us; he has had a hard, laborious life; and I do think it is very *bad taste* of these people to go about trying to put us down in this way: to be jeering at what they condescend to accept. You are in love, and it is very natural you shouldn't see this; but it is a deep mortification to papa and to me. Even to-day—to be obliged to ask them here! to humble ourselves to her! and all for you. You ought to be grateful."

The youth looked bewildered.

"But what can I do! Rose, tell me; you always advised me. I don't want to be selfish."

"Well, you can do this, at least: what

is, indeed, only decency. Speak firmly to them; require the respect that is due to our family—our *low* family, as they seem to think it. They will respect you the more for it. As it is, they seem to consider you a mere boy—that they can do what they like with. You would not be so wholly selfish, after all that has been sacrificed for you?"

The youth looked grave and disquieted. The thing had never been put in this way before.

"But Olivia!" he said. "Surely you cannot think that—"

"I, of course, except her; I have done so all along. This is no question about her. But there is question of your own self-respect. Heavens, how I have suffered—how we have all suffered! And I tell you how you have a position with

regard to them, and are really bound to make some exertions and see that you are respected, by your family's being respected."

This was a new light for the young man, who felt a little humiliated in presence of his worldly-wise sister, and who had put it very forcibly before him. She was right. Livy was all that could be wished; but he was under no obligation towards the rest of the family. And he recalled now the implied tone, and the scarcely concealed contempt, with which Mrs. Talbot spoke of them before him.

When it was time to set out for the dinner party, the Beauty was confounded, and "put out," by seeing his wife come down splendidly dressed, and looking really magnificent. Excitement, or anger,

gave the tender flush to her cheeks, which was her charm in the days of Mr. Chalon, and the old light seemed to have come back to her eyes. She had, besides, the true refined stateliness—the air of the high-bred lady.

"I thought you were not going," said the Beauty, angrily.

"I persuaded her, Beauty dear; so we are all going together, and mean to have such a pleasant night."

They were very silent as they drove along, the Beauty much out of humour at his not being allowed to perform alone on his favourite boards. "This was the way in which he was always interfered with."

When the Talbots arrived they found that they were late, and that all the company were assembled—Lady Shipley al-

ready enthroned, as it were, in a divan, and talking volubly. Mr. Hardman had quite a displeased air; indeed, he had been inflamed by a speech of that lady.

"At all the great houses in town, as you know, my dear Mr. Hardman, it is *the thing* to be before the time Your friends, I suspect, have forgotten the hour."

Mrs. Labouchere struck in—

"We must submit, Lady Shipley. They are our masters and mistresses."

"I dined once at poor Lady Greyplover's, and they expected the old Duke of Banff-shire. They just gave him a quarter of an hour, and then went to dinner. He came in a little after they had sat down, and was not the least put out. He knew it was the regular course of things."

His son was very restless, and rather

annoyed. It did look as if Mrs. Talbot delighted to try and mortify his family.

The moment they entered, Mr. Hardman called to his servant, "Now, dinner!" —a shocking barbarism, as Mrs. Talbot took care to show the company she thought it, by turning round with a sort of haughty start. The room was crowded; and, almost at once, Mrs. Labouchere went over to our Beauty and brought him to a pink-cheeked, good-looking gentleman, who was in the window.

"To be sure," said Colonel Fotheringham, delighted. "We did not see each other in the dark. I was out of humour that night."

The Beauty was enchanted at this *amende*. His wife was looking over, and must have heard it. He was growing more important every hour. Colonel

Fotheringham began to talk pleasantly on other matters; and then the procession was formed down to dinner. That meal was a more tremendous effort of state than Mr. Hardman had yet attempted. He had never yet got such distinguished people together at his board. But, though Mrs. Talbot had priority of rank, Lady Shipley was the leading lady. Her voice was heard above all. She was seated beside the host—was now loud, now extravagantly confidential. She ate of everything, and praised everything.

"Never saw anything better done, or in better taste. Charming. And now, my dear Mr. Hardman, tell me about these people. I shouldn't call them *these* people, because——"

She had to be very confidential here,

as Mrs. Talbot was on the other side of the host.

"She seems quite a monarch-of-all-she-surveys sort of person. Even patronised me?—ha! ha! You saw that? Of course, you did. And that little girl is your son's intended? Nice, amiable little thing, she seems; I am sure, she will turn out a good domestic wife."

All this was very low and confidential.

"But I *wish* she had more mark and character; virtue alone will not do now-a-days, my dear Mr. Hardman. We must all push—push—push! You and I have had to do that."

"What you say is admirable, my dear Lady Shipley. No one puts a thing better."

The conversation wandered off into pictures, last Academy Exhibition, very

favourite topics at country dinner parties, where people talk familiarly of such shows, Rotten Row, &c, as if they were in the next street. Mrs. Talbot, excellent actress as she was, being now in front of the foot-lights, was unconstrained and easy, "the great lady" in short; just as if she had no wolf gnawing at her very heart. She was easy, smiling, gay. But it was almost with horror, that she heard the bold Lady Shipley make this remark,

"By the way, there is a little picture in your drawing-room, Mr. Hardman, which shows you have real taste. It seems to me a master-piece, and——"

"Which one, Lady Shipley? I can assure you, I get ashamed sometimes when I think of all the cheques I have drawn for pictures."

"This was a small picture, finely done;

such force, such power, such colours. I assure you, I don't know when I was so pleased; Honoria, too, was quite struck with it."

"Oh, it was charming, mamma. I could stand hours before it."

It would be impossible to convey the arrogance with which he turned to Mrs. Talbot. Every moment, indeed, he began to feel his wrongs coming back on him with fresh force, and some new circumstances were making him regard the whole family with an increasing dislike.

"I am glad to hear you say this," he said, "as Mrs. Talbot was of quite an opposite opinion, and treated the picture with great contempt."

"How, why?" said Lady Shipley, leaning forward; "I am sure she is too good a judge."

"This is the most astonishing mistake," said Mrs. Talbot, looking round; "on the contrary, I admired it immensely: in fact, I said it was worth all the rest of the collection."

"Oh, how severe!" said Lady Shipley. "What a wicked stroke."

"My collection is good, and can take care of itself," said he, growing red. "No one can say I have not encouraged art. The cheques I have drawn for pictures could not be exceeded by any nobleman in the country. I have outbid dukes and lords before now."

"But now, as a matter of curiosity, Mrs. Talbot; why don't you like the picture?"

"I *do* like it. I think it the prettiest thing I have seen for a long time——"

"But Mr. Hardman says something about contempt."

"Oh, that did not refer to the merits of the picture. If Mr. Hardman insists——"

Mrs. Labouchere saw to what all this was leading up, and she came sweeping down hotly to the rescue, like a dashing troop of cavalry. "Papa is too modest to tell that story; but I shall for him. He saw how much it was admired, and was generous enough to bring it himself, as a present. Mrs. Talbot knows that this was the case. It is always easy to mortify, when you get such an advantage as that. Poor papa! it was a very unkind return."

"To decline a present! Mr. Hardman was, indeed, kind enough to bring it in his carriage. But it was impossible for me to accept it."

"How kind of you, Mr. Hardman,"

said Lady Shipley, enthusiastically. "What a charming man! You are quite gallant."

"It seems not," he said. "But it was well meant; let us say no more about it."

"Oh, but it is so interesting. I am afraid there are very few people who would offer *me* pictures."

"Would you let me make a beginning, Lady Shipley?" said he, hesitating. "As you picked out, and admired the picture, I should be too proud if you would let me send it over——"

"No; but if you would bring it over yourself," she said, in a sort of flattering way. "If you would do *that!*"

"To-morrow, if it should be convenient, I shall certainly have the honour," he answered, looking round with pride and defiance at Mrs. Talbot.

That lady bit her lip.

"People take different views about presents. I believe it is considered that a short acquaintance does not admit of the acceptance of one. Of course it may be different in this case."

All this time Mr. Hardman's son had been listening with a sort of impatience and restlessness — distracted from his bounden attentions to the young lady next him. She saw and wondered at his distraction. At this point he said, warmly, "I *do* wish your mother would not go on in that way. It is making me quite unhappy. Surely you have interest with her, and affection for her, and a word from you would show her how foolish it is."

"But mamma does nothing," said Livy, her soft eyes turning to him. "You

know that yourself. It does not come from *her*."

"But it is so unmeaning," he went on, growing more eager. "Why should she set up *despising* our family and affronting my father, who *is* my father, in that way. Surely you must see, as they say, that despising him, is despising me. If she thinks our family worthy of being connected with her, she should think it worthy of being treated with ordinary respect."

"It is very strange to hear you say this to me. Why do you not go at once, and say it to mamma herself?"

"Because it will come better from you. And it is really growing into a very important and serious matter. You must consider one's family, and if one loses one's self-respect, you know——"

"This is all quite new from you," said she, much hurt; "there is no need to begin preaching at me in that way. Why should you not keep your self-respect?" she added, with glowing cheeks. "By all means do so. But shall I tell you what I have been thinking: that my heart bleeds and burns to see the way my darling mother is treated. The humiliation she has to suffer on my account, and the annoyance given her, *through all that she holds most dear*. You will understand me. I see it more and more every moment, all that she is forced to suffer, and it seems to me most cruel to her. It is done on purpose; I see it."

She spoke so excitedly that he turned and followed her eyes, and he saw that his sister and her father were engaged in

eager conversation, and that on the Beauty's face was that conscious, and half foolish air which betokened some compliment paid, and much satisfaction on its receipt. The sight kindled her yet more.

"I might call on you," she went on, "to make a change in all this, as it is not becoming that your family should bring trouble into ours, and require you to separate yourself altogether from all those who are trying to make mischief in ours."

"Oh, as for that," said the young man, "we must go back to those who began it. I must own, and it is only justice to say so, that it was Mrs. Talbot commenced by despising our family. We owe a respect to ourselves, and you would not respect me if I put up with all that."

"Put up with all that," she repeated, wondering; "this is all very strange."

He felt he had spoken too brusquely, and, as usual in such cases, with persons of not very strong minds, chose to justify himself, instead of withdrawing.

"Oh, really, I am serious, and that depends on you as much as on me. My father is behaving wonderfully, considering. You heard even since dinner began, what Lady Shipley said about the picture—how delightedly she received the offer. He has acted in a very straightforward way with me, and intends, I know, though I am going against all his wishes in this matter—and I do not regret it a moment, understand me, and never shall, though I speak in this way—he means, I under-

stand, to behave in the handsomest way to me. It is to make not the slightest difference in his arrangements for our settlement in life. Now the least return I can make him, is to see that he is properly treated, and with the respect that is due to him."

The gentle Livy felt an inexpressible soreness at her heart as she listened to this new strain—it was so practical, and even cruel. She only said, after a moment's pause,—

"Don't let us talk any more of this; now, at least."

That Colonel Fotheringham had noted this graceful and interesting young girl, who was so utterly thrown away upon "that lout," who plainly did not understand the true town-bred fashion of treat-

ing such precious objects; and he made a resolution, which he afterwards hoped to carry out.

CHAPTER V.

BEATEN BACK.

MEANWHILE the dinner went on, the Beauty really "coming out," as he thought; and Mr. Hardman more and more devoted to Lady Shipley. Every moment was heard his hoarse, grating voice, tuned to obsequiousness,—

"Your ladyship makes me feel quite proud. No?"

"Ah, I declare, my dear Mr. Hardman, I wish we had more people like you."

This was, indeed, a sincere wish on her part.

"A man of your liberal ideas should be more before the country; we should have your opinions given publicly. You should teach us. Men like you know more of the world. What noble grapes! Why, Lord Wiganthrope, who pays something fabulous for every bunch he eats, and who has them all the year round, has no finer."

Here was a longed-for opportunity: the august gardener, who came to him from Lord ——, with the duke's coachman, who disdained to break down the barriers between his own office and other menial ones, and whom no one would dare—least of all his master—to ask to attend, were then introduced upon the scene.

At last the ladies went upstairs, and after a time the gentlemen followed.

Again Lady Shipley was brought forward to the place of honour, and done profound homage to, in the most abasing way. Father and daughter joined in total overlooking of Mrs. Talbot. Her husband's opinion was asked on every point, with a deference that really seemed obsequiousness; and his declarations were listened to with an attention that might at an earlier period of his life have amazed him. No one was more anxious for these opinions than his late opponent, Colonel Fotheringham; and there was a generous adherence in that officer, which showed that he wished to make up for his previous behaviour.

Mrs. Talbot was overlooked, neglected, in comparison with the great Lady Shipley, before whom Mr. Hardman literally prostrated himself. His manner to Mrs.

Talbot since the acceptance of the picture had become almost insolent, and, at least, brusque. Before, he had always had the uneasy feeling in reference to this little transaction that he might have made a sort of mistake, and that his chastisement was more or less deserved. But now Lady Shipley's kindness had removed every doubt of the kind. It came on him suddenly that he had been insulted, outraged, and humiliated; and he could *never forgive it.* Mrs. Labouchere saw this change in her father, and seconded it ably. Our Livy's eyes seemed to see it more clearly every instant.

When Mr. Hardman came up he went over pompously to Lady Shipley.

"We are so happy to have you here, my Lady Shipley. It is pleasant to find

such good taste. Come, ma'am, let me show you your picture."

"I will take it away with me this night. I won't let it out of my sight, or you may change your mind, and offer it again to Mrs. Talbot."

"No, he will scarcely do that," said Mrs. Labouchere. "Poor papa was quite punished enough."

Mrs. Talbot was losing all her old skill in the *Bandillero* line.

"There is a difference," she said, with a trembling voice, "between good-nature and other motives. How do you know that picture was offered to me from good-nature?"

"It is to me," said Lady Shipley; "and it is the nicest compliment that has been paid to me for years."

"You have been acquainted with Mr.

Hardman only a few weeks, I believe?" she said, with great contempt.

"Oh, as for that," said the other lady, coolly, "I have often made a valuable friendship in a day. There is such a thing as love at first sight; and why not friendship? There's Mr. Talbot, looking as if he agreed with me."

"It's a *beautiful* picture, Lady Shipley," he said, with wisdom; "and I think she must have been dreaming when she refused it. Such a miss—it is quite provoking!"

"I always said, papa, if Mr. Talbot had been at home, your picture would have been lost to you for ever. He was too sensible to let such a chance slip."

"Everybody seems to be down on you, Mrs. Talbot," Lady Shipley said; "even your husband."

Oh, poor Livy!—her cheeks burning with shame and sympathy, her eyes flashing with indignity—she could have sunk into the earth. Her young lover—half discontented, as if he was disappointed at her new-born independence, remained aloof. She called him over.

"Listen, when I get home to-night," she said, "I shall write to you."

"About what?" he asked. "Why not tell me now?"

"I shall find it easier to write. All this is growing unendurable. I begin to see what I never saw before. You must choose your side. Everybody that is not with me, and with mine, is against me."

At this moment the Beauty was being led over to the piano, praised by no one so much as by Colonel Fotheringham. He was called on for his famous song. He

must sing it. He was not at all indisposed. Who was to accompany the famous song? He would have to accept his wife. She knew that; and, with a curling lip, hesitated whether she should consent. There was a short struggle. She might give him a lesson—put him down; it would do him good. She would be no slave. It was time that she should vindicate herself. Still, it seemed a petty shape of revenge. It was unworthy of her; so she rose up for the duty.

Suddenly Mrs Labouchere stepped forward, with a smiling air.

"My song; *my* song. It is my patent, and I really *must*. You must allow me, Mr. Talbot."

Immensely flattered, the foolish Beauty replied,—

"Oh, yes. No one has such a good

title as you, Mrs. Labouchere. Oh, if you would only——"

"Would she? Of course she must," Mr. Hardman said. "Lord Bindley said as much at Bindley."

"Of course," said Mrs. Labouchere to Mrs. Talbot, "if you *insist*, I must give up my hobby. Indeed, I feel I ought."

"What nonsense!" said the Beauty, impatiently. "I can't sing it to any one's accompaniment but yours."

Olivia was beside him, and whispered,—

"Oh, poor mamma. Don't!"

He turned round angrily.

"It is intolerable," he said. "I'm not going to be made a child of!"

Mrs. Labouchere caught the words, "a child."

"Who will be bold enough to do *that?*

No, you have too much spirit. *I* should not venture on such an attempt."

Something in her look, something in her tone—so meaning, so overflowing with significance—struck Livy, that it almost filled her heart with terror; for in that moment the wings of the scene seemed to be drawn away, and there seemed to be revealed at her feet the abyss before her family, with all its dangers and terrors. It struck a perfect chill to her young soul, from the suddenness and unexpectedness of the view. There, at the edge—instead of the agreeable, conventional lady of society — was a hideous, ever-leering siren, whose cold fingers seemed to clasp his arm, and try to drag him over, with a hideous marine coquetry. While he——well, he was her foolish, good-natured Beauty of a father.

His song, however, was sung — was received with the usual absurd enthusiasm; and Lady Shipley rose up, and rushed over to congratulate. She—unconsciously, perhaps—drove one more nail into the coffin of their domestic happiness.

"My dear Mr. Talbot, you have a divine voice. How Mrs. Talbot must be enchanted at hearing you entertain your friends in this way. It must be charming for her."

Mrs. Labouchere was more and more emboldened.

"A prophet, or a singer, is nothing in his own country, or *at home*. We found out Mr. Talbot, and brought him forward. Mrs. Talbot is quite too diffident about his merits. By-and-by, we shall make him burst on the *London*

public. I am laying the train already, Mr. Talbot. We know people that will be enchanted to hear you sing, that will get up parties for you—regular concerts. I say, and Lady Shipley thinks so, too, that it is a shame to have such a voice buried in the suburbs. He must be brought out."

"Oh, he must be brought out," said Lady Shipley.

Delightful all this for the Beauty, who seemed to murmur and quiver with satisfaction—not very distinctly though. Terrible almost for Mrs. Talbot, who had lost all her power of cut and thrust, either from helplessness, or from want of spirit. Something of her old training did not desert her.

The guests clustered round; Colonel Fotheringham—now an ardent friend and

admirer—led him over, and once more the blushing Beauty gave out his famous song. A perfect roar of applause greeted it, for, under pressure of his wrongs, and stimulated by public support, he gave it out with unusual fire. He seemed to himself as if he was the statue of some public man on a pedestal: and it was wonderful the secret indignation he felt towards those who grudged him his popularity.

Mrs. Talbot, whose nerves and moral muscles seemed to be relaxing every hour, sat afar off, writhing almost as her enemy sat at the piano, and played without expression, and every now and again looked up with smiling approval and approbation into the face of the gentleman she was accompanying. Never had he sung so well, Mrs. Labouchere told

him : with low encouragement, "beautiful ! charming !" audible even to his wife's ears, stimulated him. And at the end, flushed, victorious, he stood there, the centre of universal acclaim, and felt a resentful feeling against those who would not lend him their sympathies in his triumph.

When he was done, she rose up to go. She interrupted the chorus of "charming !"—"admirable !" by asking for their carriage. Mrs. Labouchere, without rising from the piano, said carelessly, "Why we are only beginning the night ; we are going to have more songs."

"So sorry," said Mrs. Talbot, with trembling lips, "to interfere with your plans, but it is late."

"Not at all," said the other ; "quite early, I assure you. We can't spare

you, Mr. Talbot, I assure you. Can we, Lady Shipley?"

"My dear, he is a treasure. Such an organ! I assure you, Mrs. Talbot, you don't half value him, not half. Oh, sing on, sing us more of your little things, Mr. Talbot."

"We must go," said Mrs. Talbot, turning to her husband; "would you ask for the carriage?"

"Oh, folly, nonsense!" he said, in a testy whisper. "Don't make a fool of yourself. You are ridiculous."

"*What?*"

"Don't make yourself a *fool*," he repeated, his eyes flashing, and forgetting all his usual traditions of the gentleman; "*you* may go home if you like."

"You would not let us go by ourselves, would you?"

"I don't mean to stir. I'm not a child to be ordered home in this way!"

Livy heard all this, every word. So did her lover, or her *late* lover, who made a remonstrance.

"Do stay a little longer. They are all doing so."

"I tell you what," Mrs. Labouchere said suddenly, as if from an inspiration; "Lady Shipley will leave Mr. Talbot at home; that will satisfy Mrs. Talbot. Won't it?" she added, addressing that lady with a sort of mocking and smiling air. "Poor Mr. Talbot, he has all our sympathies. The school-gates are shut, I suppose, at midnight, and the master flogs all the truant boys."

"Oh, how funny!" he said, "but I assure you not at all. There is no master and no flogging. I am going

home with Lady Shipley. Tom will be quite enough to take care of you."

"Papa, papa!" whispered Livy, in an agitated way. "Oh, you will come, you must come!"

He turned on her with an angry look. But he said nothing, and turned away. Mrs. Talbot carried out the poor attempt at a smile, and at indifference. Mrs. Labouchere, as it were, pressing on her, as she retreated, yet still restrained by perfect politeness, fired the last gun.

"We shall take care of him. Perhaps we shall keep him prisoner, and not let him back till to-morrow."

"Stay the night; I declare a very good idea," said Mr. Hardman. "My dear Talbot, use no ceremony. We could put up regiments here."

The unfortunate Mrs. Talbot could not endure much more of this; all her strength and spirit was leaving her fast. She turned to go, and took her host's arm. All the way down he kept chatting in his pompous way. "It makes no difference, ma'am, to us, who stay, or who do not. We have always the spare rooms ready. Your husband would be very comfortable if he chose to remain," &c. She did not hear. He remained.

On their way back neither mother nor daughter spoke. Livy heard her mother's sobs: in the darkness she could not see her face. She clung to her and clasped her again and again, and in that long agony came to a resolution which had dimly occurred to her before now, as the sole desperate solution of the crisis. As the carriage swept up their little

avenue, she had determined on it irrevocably.

She said nothing of it to any one. Her mother was sobbing hysterically on the sofa. She was beaten—could never fight again. The long struggle was over. They were to sit up to wait for him to return.

"Oh! heavens above!" said the wretched lady. "What have I done to deserve all this? It was a miserable day when these people came to the place; a more miserable one still when we contracted that wretched engagement. What infatuation was over us! Such a degrading thing could only bring us misery. Oh, Livy, Livy, your happiness has cost us a terrible sacrifice."

Livy could only think of the conventional fashion of making light of all.

"After all, dearest, what is it? He wishes to amuse himself."

"Wishes to amuse himself! Sport to him, death to me! He is gone, ruined; lost to us! And, Livy dear, I do not grudge it to you, though your marriage has been bought so dear. But it is a sort of judgment on me; for there there was a time when I used to sacrifice others, as carelessly as I am now sacrificed myself. You deserve to be happy, dearest, at any cost; for you have been a sweet, good child, and have done your best to make me happy. It has failed."

All this, it will be said, about a gentleman staying behind at a dinner party, to sing his little songs! But this acute lady of fashion saw further; and saw, too, that the beginning of the end was at hand. That "staying behind to sing his little

songs meant far more." Then her daughter had left her. With a pang she thought how selfish all the world was. Here were two people, and their happiness, sacrificed for her. She ought to be grateful, indeed. But no one could grudge it to her.

Absent some half hour, the young girl returned, smiling and cheerful. No signs still of the Beauty. It came to midnight —then to one o'clock. The gates were closed. There could be no hope after that. The banner of defiance was flaunted in their faces; he was losing even decency. Then a cold calm came over Mrs. Talbot, and, with a genuine Roman stoicism, she resigned herself, and went to her room.

"Tom! Tom!" said Livy, eagerly—she had stolen down—"oblige me by

running up the road and putting this letter in the pillar-box."

Tom got his hat, and took care to read the direction privately.

"She be mortially in luf," Tom said, "that she can't wait till morning."

CHAPTER VI.

A GALLANT SACRIFICE.

The Beauty, indeed, had remained; but came down next morning, feeling a little guilty. He had an uneasy feeling that he had taken some step that was *too* bold, and might turn out dangerous. He awoke early and grew uncomfortable, and went down to walk out in the garden before any one was up, and think angrily over his wrongs. It was growing intolerable. He would not put up with preaching to him before people, insulting those who were kind to him, and going on in that ridiculous, stupid way, which no else did.

Surely that business of the picture spoke volumes! Surely——

"Out so early!" said the soft voice of Mrs. Labouchore, close behind him.

She had a black lace scarf, in Spanish fashion, about her head, to keep off the morning air, and looked brilliant, indeed; —at least, foolish Mr. Talbot thought so. Here was one that really understood him, and he could not but like and feel grateful too.

"I am so glad you stayed," she went on; "even though I was sorry to see Mrs. Talbot did not. Why is it that she is so set against every little thing that seems to give you pleasure? I assure it is a subject of speculation with many; and you are so gentle and quiet, and bear it so angelically."

"Oh, I don't bear it, and won't. Of

course, one doesn't choose to make a fuss about trifles, always. It's not manners."

"Even that old viper, Lumley, said something about training, and all that. Malicious creature! I don't know how to train; I wish I did. You would do nothing for *me*, with all my training."

"I would do a great deal," said the Beauty, proudly. "You can't imagine how I admire and like you. Since I have known you I seem to feel more independent. With you I have spent many happy hours; I assure you I have," he added, bending, by way of his best compliment. "Someway, with you I am always so much at home, and so happy. Whereas, at home——"

"Oh," she said with enthusiasm, "how kind—how nice—how good of you

to say so! That is the most welcome thing I have heard, I don't know for how long!"

"How?" he asked blushing.

"It was natural and genuine, and I like it for that. It is long since, much of the world as I have seen, I have heard such a thing. But can I tell *you*—out of what you must call my own *selfishness*—nothing else—that in that kindness, as you consider it, to *you*, I have been consulting only my own humour—following my own whim, if you like to call it so."

"How do you mean?" said the Beauty, colouring still more.

"You know, then, what sort of life has been mine. How full of trouble, and wretchedness, and misunderstanding. My hurried marriage with *him*. Yet even then your wife interfered; did her best to

injure me. I have forgiven her for that, long ago. She must do me so much justice."

"It *was* strange and unkind," said the Beauty. "I never understood it."

"Did mortal ever hear of such unceasing persecution and venom?" she went on, growing excited. "Ever since that time, it has never relaxed a moment. I can see it in her face; it is consuming her like a fever. You know that it embitters her life."

The Beauty did not deny it.

"Well, then, finding nothing but this bitterness—this hollowness and deceit, on all sides—even in that venomous old creature, Lumley, whom I despise; for he has his cast at me behind my back—it is mean, is it not?—well, in all this cloud of odium I find something in *you*, of sym-

pathy, and myself turning to you constantly, as something that I feel interest in—that I like to think of—that I turn to when absent. I cannot explain this—I know not by what name to call it; but so it is. There it remains; and I should not care were Mrs. Talbot here herself for me to tell it to. There is nothing to be ashamed of. I was a soldier's wife—a brave man's wife, and do not fear her, or any one. She will not intimidate me. Had she, indeed, been gentle or womanly, I should have done anything for her. *Now* she shall not get me beneath her feet. Never!"

The Beauty was quite struck by her brilliancy and fire, as she made this long speech of defiance. Her cheeks glowed, and he thought he had never seen her looking so handsome.

"She would give the world," went on Mrs. Labouchere, "that this marriage was never to be. It is hateful to her—loathsome. She never thinks that it has *your* approval. *You* are above these prejudices. You are not enthusiastic; but, having once accepted it, you are too much of a gentleman to try and draw back. I have seen that through the whole; I have, indeed. And that was another thing that made me like and admire you—your manly and straightforward conduct."

"How kind of you to say all this! Oh, yes; that was what I said from the beginning. Once consent, and then keep to it. In fact I always *insisted*, when I saw signs of her wishing to draw back, that there should be nothing of the kind."

"I thought so," she said, enthusiastically. "I knew it. Something seems

to me to have inspired you lately. I have been struck by the change."

"Yes," the Beauty said, eagerly; "I own it. Since I have known you, Mrs. Labouchere, somehow, I have felt so much happier; and I find myself thinking when at a distance—"

He stopped.

"Yes," she said, eagerly, as a curious, greedy look came into her eyes. "Yes; tell me that."

His eyes fell upon the ground.

"Oh, I wish," he said; "I *wish* that—"

But he could not venture to say *that* as yet.

He remained silent.

She waited a moment, then spoke herself.

"We both approve this marriage, for the same reason. You say it *must* be carried through, so do I. May I venture to say

it? It is time that Mrs. Talbot should begin to learn a little of life from you; and that bitter lesson is necessary."

"Oh, of course it shall be carried through. It is quite necessary."

At this moment came in the day's post —letters for everybody. Some for Mrs. Labouchere; while young Hardman suddenly appeared on the slope, looking a little heated—more angry than grieved. He came towards them hastily.

"See this—see here, Rose. What does this mean, Mr. Talbot? Surely you can't allow this? It is childish, unmeaning; and after all that has passed—"

He put the letter into the Beauty's hand who read it in wonder.

It was from Livy.

"What will you think of me, when I write you what I have determined on, since

being at your house? Determined, I say, after all that I saw there. Our marriage cannot be—can *never* be. I have made up my mind. I shall free those I love from a bondage that is hateful, and causing untold misery: and I care not what misery I cause myself if I do this. I think, too, that you have changed since all this began. As I told you, those who are against her are against *me*. I could sacrifice everything for them. I am made use of as something to torture them. Thank God, I have the means of stopping that. Goodbye. Forgive me, if I cause you any deep pain by this.

"LIVY."

"What absurdity!" the Beauty said, angrily. "No consulting me either! It can't be."

Mrs. Labouchere seemed utterly overwhelmed at what she had received. Her lips were curling with scorn, as she read. Hers ran :—

"Dear Mrs. Labouchere,

"My daughter Olivia has told me of the letter she despatched to you last night. As nothing will change her purpose, I lose no time in letting you know how thoroughly I concur in the propriety of the step she has taken. The whole business was unsuitable: it never had my approbation, from the beginning; but I was content to leave the matter to time. As you may wish to know the reason, which dear Olivia could never bring herself to tell, I may as well say frankly, that she has latterly begun to see things very much as I do—thank God for it; and that

she knows now the object for which the marriage seems to have been promoted. I congratulate myself on its having turned out in this way. I am not sure, but *know*, it will be for the best.

"Perhaps you would mention this change in affairs to Mr. Hardman, and to Mr. Talbot, who is with you."

"Not worth while consulting you," was her first remark.

The Beauty was in fury.

"Never tired of insulting me," he muttered. "They planned all this behind my back. But it *shan't* be. What *do* they mean? What are they at?"

Her eyes were fixed on the letter

"Would you wish *really* to know? Then it is meant against *you* and *me*—against us. There is the whole truth for you,

plainly spoken! She cannot match me at any other weapons, and so she takes this poor way of sacrificing her child. She can show you, too, that she can dispose of the most important matters without consulting you."

"But she shall not. I know what all this is about. It will break Livy's heart. Poor, poor child!" added the Beauty, with new-born paternal tenderness, "to punish her in that way!"

"Is it not strange," she went on, "that this should have come, just as we were talking of that one subject. What a strange dislike," she said, as if talking to herself, "and all because *I* like——"

The foolish smile came on the Beauty's lips. He was still the old *vainqueur*, irresistible, charming, able to subdue

women's hearts to himself. Here was this brilliant, transcendently clever lady, who was handsome, besides, and who had now for this long time past been gradually drawn under the influence of the spell. He was amazed as he looked back, and saw the whole steady course of the affair—her indifference at first, her almost dislike, then all giving way gradually to his seductive influence. As he looked at her, he felt his heart stirred in a way it had not been for years, with vanity and complacent love, and at the same moment, felt a rush of bitter hostility against *those*—he chose to make it plural —whose whole life seemed to be laid out for the purpose of annoying, and worrying him.

Now came out Mr. Hardman. "Why, what on earth is this? My son has just

got a letter from your daughter about this marriage. Well, it is unfortunate."

"Oh, never mind," said the Beauty; "I shall go home at once, and see to it; I shall take care that the matter is settled as it was."

"Oh, I don't know that," said Mr. Hardman, pompously. "I don't want any chopping, and changing of that sort. I wish it finally to be, as it is now. Mrs. Talbot can't be playing fast and loose with us in this way."

"But it is not Mrs. Talbot; she has nothing whatever to do with it. I'll settle it all."

"You, nonsense!" Mr. Hardman said, with something very like contempt. "The thing must remain as it is; I wish it so. And to tell you the truth, I am not at all sorry. Really, all the treatment

I have had to put up with from your wife——"

"But, father, you will not let it be said about the place, that they have put us down in this way, broken off the match, as if we were some common people to be treated any way."

"Oh, nonsense! you needn't say those sort of things. No one can treat me in any way, I can tell you. If Mrs. Talbot," he still would ignore her husband, "were to come to me now on her knees, and implore me to change my mind, I would not."

"This is all because you were in trade, and they think we have a trader's soul. Perhaps we have," she added scornfully, "as they can treat us in this fashion. Now is your time to take your place, and show that you are above this treatment.

Firmly and determinately insist on this agreement being carried out. Mr. Talbot, the girl's father, requires it, too."

"Oh, as for that, Mr. Hardman——"

"I am the boy's father, and I don't want it, and I beg you won't interfere with me." He never minded what he said before the Beauty.

"No, we have not much pride, father," she said. "We certainly show ourselves true children of the people."

"I don't understand you, don't you forget yourself," he answered. "I am going over to Lady Shipley's, and my son shall come with me. Get the carriage round, d'ye hear, John?"

The young man came back timorously when his father was gone.

"I see what the game is," said she. "Lady Shipley, indeed! But it mustn't be!

Have you no spirit, no regard for this girl, Mr. Talbot's daughter, who gave you her affections ?"

"But she gives me up. Such a letter to write to me! Besides, why should you take this turn now ? You know, you never approved of it, and would have given the world to see it broken off."

"I would. I own it here fearlessly, and Mr. Talbot knows it. He will do me the justice to say I have always been candid and frank to him. He knows how I disliked this, and why. There, go with your father on your mercantile expedition. Let us be traders to the end."

The Beauty strode into his own home with an unusual fussiness and dignity. "Where are they ?"—"Send them here !" &c.

There was no need. Mrs. Talbot came gliding in, pale and worn, the marks of tears on her cheeks. The very act of her closing the door with a purpose made the Beauty uncomfortable.

"Now, what is all this?" he began.

"Oh, hush," she said; "no matter about that now. We must see about the future now. Tell me simply and calmly, what is the meaning of this new course you have taken up? I ask a plain answer, and don't be *afraid* to speak plain."

"Afraid! Oh, that is all nonsense. I know you try to make me afraid."

"You poor, contemptible child, you shallow fribble! The proper way would be to treat you, as if you were not responsible."

"Oh, come!" said he, bursting into a

sort of "sputter" of rage. "I won't have this tone to me. What do you take me for? I have put up with it too long; such insolence and speeches, just as if I was a child."

"I disdain to argue with you; but wish simply to come to an understanding. My health is not equal to this worry. I can't be finding sense for you always, and watching to repair your mistakes. God knows it has gone on years enough. It must now end. Livy and I wish for change of air. I assure you, the doctors ordered it to me months ago."

"I shan't have Livy taken away. I am not going to give into this foolish plan. Now she is to marry, now she shan't; such chopping and changing! No wonder they take us for fools. She is my daughter, and the law gives me power

over her, and she shan't stir. No! I will put it to *that* test. I will see who's to be the child, or cipher now. Just try it. For shame of yourself! To turn your daughter's happiness into a—a—means of annoying a person you hate. But I won't allow it. Here, where is she? Let me tell her so."

"No-o-o, no!" she said, rushing between him and the door; "not before her! It would kill her to hear us going on in this way."

"Kill her, nonsense! I'm going to be a child no longer, I can tell you. Let me ring the bell. Don't stop me."

"You poor creature!" went on Mrs. Talbot, in a low husky voice. "I am ashamed of myself, when I think how long I have made an idol of such an object. The precautions, the miser-

able, childish precautions I have taken. I am humiliated when I think of it. You are not worth it an hour."

"How dare you——"

"Don't! don't forget to what I am entitled. I won't listen to it. It is like your weak soul, to have mistaken all my tenderness and watchings, for fear of yourself! Now, however, that is all at an end, and you must speak plainly. What is your course going to be, after this? I know what mine shall be."

"It shall be whatever I choose it to be. There!" said the Beauty, dismayed and most uncomfortable at this situation. "I'm not going to be a cipher in this house any longer."

"I ask you again, what is your course?"

"And I tell you again, I shan't be

questioned, and put down in that way. It's all folly. It's my wish, *as the head of this house,* that we should keep to this arrangement with the Hardmans, and I shall take care that it is done. And they are determined on it, too. Where's Olivia? Here, Olivia, come here."

That poor fluttering heart was not far off. She heard the angry voices piercing upwards through the ceiling to her little bower, where, as every tone was raised higher, it made her young heart shrink. She was down in an instant.

"Listen, Livy," said her mother, sternly. "Mr. Talbot, your father, wishes you to go back on that last step you have taken. Come, dearest child: do what you will about it. Think only of your own happiness."

"Oh, it is only yours, papa and

mamma, that I care for," sobbed the young girl. "It is terrible to see all this going on! I cannot bear it. I do not care what becomes of me, when you, dearest father and mother, are in this way."

"Oh, childish nonsense!" he said. "I am not going to be made a fool of in my own house, I can tell you. To have the whole neighbourhood laughing at me. I think it was very uncalled-for, your taking this step without consulting me, your father,—very uncalled-for."

"Oh, don't, Beauty dearest," she began, in a sort of agony.

"And I must beg, too, that you will stop *that!* I have put up with it too long. I tell you what: you have done a foolish thing, and you must make up your mind to keep your promise,

and marry that young man. Beauty, indeed!"

"Livy knows all that she said to me last night. She will not *degrade* her poor broken-hearted mother."

"I shall be master in my own house," he said; "and if you dare to disobey me——"

The agony in her face could not be described. Now she looked at him, not at her mother.

"Kill me, if you like, Livy!" said her mother. "Think of yourself. I am weary. I long for rest, and the sooner it ends the better."

"Oh, yes, this is very romantic. I know the one who is weary, and who has suffered. I am sick of it too."

"Oh," said Mrs. Talbot, fiercely, "that I could express the contempt I feel for

myself—that I should have thought such a precious treasure worth the guarding—that womanish nature of yours, which could be so upset by some ridiculous speeches. I do not despise you; but I do myself, for my own blindness."

His voice trembled with rage. He seemed to spit forth these words: "You needn't talk. I have heard stories enough about your adventures——"

"Stop, stop!" she said, agitated. "Be generous before *her*. I have been a good and devoted wife to you——"

"Oh, we know all that," he went on, sneeringly. "I am under no compliment because you accepted me. Every body knew the reason of that." The malignant way in which he said this made Livy shrink and shiver within herself. Was this her loved Beauty, and not some loathsome

and powerless adder, trying to sting? Was this what she had loved, worshipped, and reverenced? Oh Heaven above! what was to become of her, listening to these horrors?

The Beauty thought he had brought the matter to a point by his last speech, and like every foolish man, fancied he had struck home where he had missed. "Come, now," he said, with complacency, "do what I tell you at once. Get out the ponies, and we shall drive over."

"Livy, you know me, and what you said to me. You will not at this moment cease to be what you always have been—a good daughter?"

The Beauty was getting into a fury. "*My* house, and *my* daughter! I'll not be treated in this way. Do what I tell you!"

Our poor Livy, with distress and agony on her face as though she were called on to witness a death, and, indeed, here seemed to be a death of all that had been so dear to her, hovered in a miserable uncertainty between father and mother, and knew not what to do.

"A fine mother, indeed, to give lessons! I could tell some stories that I only learnt lately, and which have been kept from me all these years back. You were once a model daughter yourself!"

Into the faded Chalon face came such a flush, so tender, and even modest, as though the unworthy charge, coming from *him*, had forced a rush of blood to that unfamiliar place. The look of physical pain —as though it had been some stab— almost extorted a cry from her child, who rushed to her, and putting her arms

about her, by this simple act seemed to proclaim that she was driven to take part with her against all the world. Into that gentle face came a look of defiance and scorn. The foolish father and husband—his breast fluttering in him with vexation and a little alarm—standing undecided at one end of the room; that fair, excited lady and daughter at the other. A space stretched between.

"Oh, *for shame*, father!" cried she, and it was the first time almost that she used that word; "for shame, father! Oh, mother dearest, I am with you always. I shall stand by you, and give up the whole world for you. No one shall insult you when I am with you."

"Oh, a nice conspiracy," sneered the Beauty. "Stand by each other as much as you like. I shall look to myself

now. I have put up with it much too long."

He literally shrank from the look of contempt on his child's face, and walked —slunk, rather—out of the room.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. HARDMAN WINS.

CERTAIN natures of a weak order, and which by that nature are accustomed to restraint and direction, when they suddenly get beyond control, become metamorphosed, and take an exaggerated bend of self-will and independence. Our Beauty — who, but for certain untoward matters, might have lived all the rest of his life in quite a monastic submission, and gone down quietly into his grave, a placid, rather foolish old gentleman— now lashed himself, as he drove along, into a perfect fury of defiance and of self-

assertion. Bearded in his own house!—a cipher—made little of at home! flouted contemptuously! but fostered, cherished, flattered by those on whom he had no claim. It was scandalous (lash on the right hand pony); outrageous (lash on the left); and he would not put up with it (lash across both backs). In fact, it was not for argument. But what really hurt him—and, in truth, rather scared him—was the sudden desertion and attack of his daughter. One so weak, and foolish, and childish, to dare to turn on him! Never mind, let them bring things to a crisis; he had friends, too. Let them do their worst, and they should see who was strongest. Indeed, he hardly knew what to do—was beside himself with rage and mortification; and felt, moreover, how weak he was.

There was one to help him, whom he found almost as excited as he was: the colour in her cheeks, the flash from her eyes, made her look splendid and handsome.

"What!" she cried; "you have come to me! You, in your troubles; yet I have mine. They have made a league against me in this house; indirectly, it would seem, because I take your side. All the world seems to be going against me."

"*I* am not," he said; "you may count upon me to the last. You have always been my friend from the beginning, and have held to me, and been so kind. Indeed, I never can forget it. But for you, I don't know what would have become of me."

"Where my sympathies are concerned,"

she answered, "and where I see injustice, I let nothing stand in the way. It is my destiny, it seems, for every one to judge me at the worst. I shall make no more attempts to set myself right in the eyes of your wife. What would you wish me to do now? They have been again unjust to you at home, I can see."

"You know everything. At home, indeed—my own home! where they try and keep me the merest cipher. But I'll not put up with it longer."

"They? Oh, has your daughter joined the league against you? A child made to turn against her father! This seems subverting the first laws of morality and of decency. I do, indeed, pity you; and would to heaven I could assist you in any way."

"Tell me what to do. You are so wise, so clever, so—charming."

She smiled.

"Hush! Mrs. Talbot does not think me so."

"No; I know not whom she thinks to be so, nor care not. It is time all this should end. I have borne it too long."

Of a sudden enters Mr. Hardman, much heated, and talking violently. He was followed by his son.

"Things are coming to a pretty pass, indeed. This is your doing again. How dare you—you, Mrs. Labouchere—interfere with my plans? It is your advice that is setting this fellow against me. I am glad you are here to listen to this, Mr. Talbot. A pretty state of things, altogether."

"Father! I cannot stand it," said the

young man. "I have behaved cruelly, infamously, to her—to Olivia; and I am tortured with remorse."

"I don't care, sir; you have taken a course, and you must keep to it."

"He is right, father," said Mrs. Labouchere, calmly. "If he feels he has done wrong to the young lady——"

"That's not the point, ma'am," said he, in a fresh fury. "I'll not have you dictating to me in my own house. You have taken too much on yourself all through. You want to direct my affairs, and I won't have it. I want no one to stay in this house, and be supported by me, and out of my means—after making a beggarly, pauperised marriage — and then——"

"For shame, father," she said, with dignity. "You forget yourself."

"You should remember," said the Beauty, "that you are speaking to a lady."

He felt a thrill as he thus came forward as her champion—a new feeling. They were both persecuted, both cruelly treated, in their own family.

Mr. Hardman was losing all restraint.

"Don't interfere, sir; I wish to have nothing to do with you, or your family. I have had to put up with enough from all concerned. That low, ill-bred insult I have received from your wife." (To his dying day he never forgot the returned picture.) "As for you, ma'am, I'll have no caballing and plotting against me in this house. I don't want you here, and never did. A nice return you make for all I have done for you, out of charity! You want to arrange every-

thing for me, the three of you. Nice work, indeed! But it is time it should all finish—and it shall."

"Have you no heart, father?" said the son, passionately. "No feeling? I know for a time I was as cruel as you; but I see the wickedness of it now, and heartily repent, Mr. Talbot."

The Beauty answered, with dignity, that he was glad to hear him say so.

"He may say what he pleases, and you may be as glad as you like; but it shall come to this. Those that choose to stay in my house, and fatten on what I give them——"

"This is degrading, father," said she; "and before people, too."

"I don't wish to be indebted to you for anything," said the son, vehemently; "this life is growing unendurable."

"I don't care," the other said, arrogantly. "I shall be obeyed in future; and I give you your choice, you and this lady, who chooses to manage everything so well. If you want me to do anything for you in future, you must follow my wishes to the letter; you, and you, too, madam! If not, just take your own course: pack out and starve, both of you, which you will, without me; or you, master, live on *her*, if it seems good to you."

"I shall live on the work of my own hands, without being dependent on any one. Thank heaven, I have made friends."

"What folly you talk; you shall do as I wish. It is time that some one should think of what my wishes are. You can't live on your pay, my lad; and

so you may as well spare yourself the humiliation of a farce of opposition, and of then returning to beg pardon. But as for you," turning to his daughter, "I'll have no opposition—no firebrands—in my house; so I just give you warning. Just take yourself off."

She drew herself up.

"You shall never repeat that warning," she said. "If I was begging in the street, I would not stop you to ask for a halfpenny."

She gave an appealing look over at the Beauty, which made his cheeks tingle.

At that moment they heard the sound of wheels; one of the few visitors, no doubt, who came to the Towers.

In another moment the door was thrown open, and Livy—alone, fluttering,

trembling with nervousness and excitement: it was her first appearance, *by herself*, on any stage—entered and stood there single-handed, alone, in a room full of enemies.

CHAPTER VIII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

The Beauty coloured and was confused.

"Now what do you want here?" he said.

Mr. Hardman's face grew dark and insolent. She was come to get back his son from him. It was bold, forward, *impudent* even; and he should deal with it as such.

"Now, Miss —— Talbot" — as though he had forgotten her name— "what do you mean by all this? It won't do. I really don't follow this.

I have your letter, and shall hold you to it. A pretty pass we're come to. But I have been speaking plainly, and I tell you, and your father here, and my excellent daughter—who chooses to join in these schemes for her own purposes—that I won't have it. I've put up with it too long. Of course, if that fellow chooses to fly in my face, and take his own course, it must be on his own risk and yours. But, if you like a beggar, as sure as this house is mine, and everything paid for with my own hard money—"

Now our Livy interrupted him, with an inexpressible sweetness and dignity. This gentle creature had hitherto twined herself about the stronger stem of her mother. She was now about to meet the strong winds unsupported.

She was to make her first protest—her first battle with the world, and against serious odds. Her own father was against her. Yet she only looked backwards, through the steel doors of this great Cruel Castle, with its ogre, and giant, and pitiless enchantress standing before her, to where her outraged, suffering mother was, lying —as she knew she was—with all the world against her. The thought gave Livy courage; and, with a voice that trembled a little, she answered,—

"You need be under no alarm, Mr. Hardman. No power on earth would get me to marry your son; I have given him up, and shall not go back in what I have done. No, papa; no, Mrs. Labouchere!"

"Oh, Livy!" said the young man;

"if you only knew how I have repented of my folly! How I was persuaded, I was made to play other people's game!"

Mrs. Labouchere looked at the Beauty, as who should say, "Do you allow this? Have you no spirit? Will you let me be insulted in this way, by a little, foolish girl?"

He interposed,—

"This is all absurd. I won't have it. You must do as I wish. Do you hear?"

His daughter answered him mournfully,—

"Yes, papa, I hear; and up to this day would have listened to anything you might desire. But I owe more to her. Oh, come back with me now. Be what you used to be,

and I will do anything, make any sacrifice, go through any mortification, to please you."

"You should accept this handsome offer," Mrs. Labouchere said, turning to him. "All will be forgotten and forgiven, if you behave properly for the future. I really think you ought. You may not get such terms later."

Mr. Hardman seemed to be master of the situation.

"I think Miss Olivia speaks very fairly, and has behaved like a lady. It is very creditable to you, Miss Talbot; and just what I expected from you. You would not force yourself on any family. Really you see the confusion and disorder all this has brought about —everyone attempting to settle things without me. Quite unbearable!"

"There will be no confusion in future," she said; "at least, that I shall be the cause of."

Again Mrs. Labouchere, rather mortified, and really furious at this repulse by a simple child, interposed, looking at the Beauty,—

"Then you, her father, approve of all this?"

"What can I do?" he said, angrily; "this is all her bringing up. She has been taught to do as she likes, making a cipher of me in my own house. Then, I tell you what, I must be obeyed. The law gives me power, and I shall exert it. It's too much, altogether. Just go home, I request of you. I am your father, recollect. I have some little authority. Just leave this. You should not have come here at all."

"Oh, papa, do not speak in that way to me."

"Yes, I shall. It's growing intolerable, all this. Insulting the friends who mean me well. All that you, too, Mrs. Labouchere, have had to put up with on my account!"

"Oh, never mind me. If I was to count up my insults from your family, Mr. Talbot——"

With a trembling voice, Livy replied,—

"Insults! none from me—none from mamma. She knows that. If I was to count the injuries — the shocking, wicked, cruel injuries—she has done us —and, worse, what she has tried to do — no insult would be too much! But I have given none. But I am not so weak, after all. I find thoughts

coming to me. Heaven helps those who are helpless. Even to-day I see that what I did has not failed."

"You have behaved very well—very well, indeed," said Mr. Hardman, patronisingly; "and we may now assume the matter to be settled. I suppose, sir, after this explicit declaration on the part of the young lady, you have sense enough to see you had better leave the matter where it is. Come with me. I wish to speak to you: and you, Talbot."

And the triumphant, rich man quitted the room, with his son and the Beauty, who, to say the truth, was not indisposed to escape.

It is impossible to describe the look with which Mrs. Labouchere regarded the young girl, now that they were alone together. A curious, almost

savage glance came to her face as she looked at the daughter of one who was so hateful to her; and who, she saw, with a sort of horror, was entering on a struggle with her, now that her mother seemed to have been worsted. The lady's eyes flashed as she stepped forward and said, bitterly,—

"What do you do here? What brings you? Did she send you?"

"I came," said Livy, in her new character, and speaking very fast and tremulously, "I came to seek *you*."

"To seek me! Why?"

"Why? To stop this cruel, this *wicked* work of yours."

"Ah, then you have been sent. She is afraid!"

"Are you a woman? Have you a woman's heart? She does not

know this; but let us speak plainly now. Oh, I own it, you have succeeded — you have crushed down my poor, darling mother; she lies there at your feet. But now let it end here; and—oh, I blush for humiliation as I say the words—*let* him go, and come back to us!"

The triumph in the other's face! she could not restrain it. Yet this was only her enemy's daughter.

"Let him go back to you! Do you, does she, mean to say that I hinder him? Why, he *comes* to me! Can I stop a large stone rolling down a hill, and send it back? Nonsense! You are a child, a young girl out of school. You do not know. You talk unreasonably—and, let me tell you, foolishly. I can do nothing for your father. As for

your mother, who has sent you to beg of me——"

Livy's figure quivered and trembled, as if in an agony.

"That is false—*all* false, as you are. I ask no more of you; and never, as there is a God looking down to protect the innocent, shall I again trouble you. Now I know you; this test has shown me what you are, and that you are an enemy unworthy of her."

"So she has taught you to make speeches to me, Miss Olivia Talbot, or have you picked up these fine things from listening to her declamations against me?"

"But I feel a greater strength every moment. She failed, because she loved him too much; I know I shall not fail, because I love her better than myself.

I do not fear you. I did, I own; but I despise you now. Oh! what a poor, mean, pitiful shape of spite!"

"Despise me, you child! You forget yourself when you talk to me in that way, you poor, weak, feeble thing. Do you suppose for a moment that you can measure your strength with me? Think of your mother."

"I do; but, after all, I have not shown myself so weak."

This went home. The other was for a moment confused, then recovered herself.

"What, having lost your lover—deprived yourself of him! How many more such victories do you propose? But it is absurd talking in this way. I am ashamed of myself for going into such a matter at all."

Livy was still working out a consequence of the speech she had just made, claiming victory.

"And though," she went on, "I have given up my own happiness, it has brought about some defeat for you, has it not? Your father has turned you out of his house—not that I glory in that, or wish you evil; but, as a fact, it *is* so?"

The look of deadly rage and mortification the other gave almost frightened her.

"You do not know me," said Mrs. Labouchere. "On your head be it then, as you choose *to take your mother's place*."

"On my own head be it then," Livy repeated. "If I save *her*, I am content."

"Save her! Of course, by keep-

ing him to you both! How probable! You don't know me. Why, I have not half put out my strength; and, in return for what you think your little advantage of to-day, I'll crush you. I promise it. There!"

Livy could hardly restrain a cry: there was something so vindictive, so venomous in the woman who was speaking to her, and who now seemed to have quite thrown away all pretence at disguise.

"Yes," went she on, "now you know what to expect; and I go now to give you a lesson."

The young girl was left alone, miserable, distracted, and thinking that, after all, she had only done mischief to the persons she loved best upon earth. She had miscalculated her own

strength, after all. What was she but a poor weak child, as described by that woman? She could only turn her soft eyes up to Heaven, and murmur a prayer for strength—something that would enable her to cope with the terrible force opposed to her.

Suddenly appears her father, much excited.

"How dare you go on in this way? What brings you to this house? What do you mean by going against me in this way, you and your *mother?*" He leant contemptuously on the word. "Just go home at once. D'ye hear."

"Not without you—not without you, dearest father. I cannot. It will kill her. You don't know what you are doing!"

And she ran forward to meet him.

He drew back, with a pitiful look in his face.

"No more of that to me; I don't want it. Let you and she keep up your conspiracy together. Don't think I have forgotten your impertinence to me before her. I'll be master in my own house yet, never fear; and I'll show to the world I am beginning to see the game—the plottings that *you and your mother* have been carrying on all these years back. I was to be kept close, and shut up—to be a laughing-stock, as if I was a fool; while you and she had your own ends to carry out—for fear I should spend my own money, which you have been putting by to make a purse, I suppose, for the time when you and she go out together in London. Thank heaven, I see the

whole of the thing now, and the disgusting slavery in which I have been living. Such a persecution! But that's all over now, and I see the truth at last."

Again was the poor girl all but crushed by this amazing change in him who had been to her all that was perfect and loveable. She could not run to him now, something held her back. It seemed as though some impish spirit had entered into him. Possibly there had, as it might seem to those older and of more experience than Livy.

She could hardly bring herself to speak to him; these morbid changes seemed to her so utterly mean and contemptible. Yet he was her father — sacred name to her.

"Come back with me," she said

again. "We shall do what you wish in future. But fly from this wicked woman. If you knew what she has threatened——"

The Beauty interposed,—

"Not a word against her. She is my true friend. I know why you both hate her, and I'll not hear her slandered. A noble, generous, persecuted woman; her kindness to me I shall never forget. Not a word. All your's and her calumnies shall not affect me in the least."

"But hear me, father."

"I'll not stay here and listen to you. Not a word about her. Never dare introduce the subject again."

Entered now Mrs. Labouchere, dressed in bonnet, shawl, &c., as if for travelling.

Mr. Talbot went up to her.

"What is this; are you going out?"

"I am going away, leaving this house where I am no longer welcome. My father has forgotten himself, not for the first time."

"And where are you going?" he asked, eagerly.

She shook her head.

"Out on the world, as they call it. I know not. I am always destined to be a wanderer. I really cannot say where I am to go. I have not thought of it even. But I have myself left; the old resources here"—and she touched her forehead—"which have never failed me yet."

"There is *my* house, where I ought to be able to offer you a temporary——"

Livy's eyes flashed.

"This is madness," she cried. "She may come; but we leave it that moment."

"As if I would accept such an offer!" Mrs. Labouchere said, smiling. "Though, if you had understood properly, Mr Talbot did not make it. He knows the world; but it shows the folly of the whole situation, and the helplessness you would bring him to, when he dare not venture to give his friend shelter. But he can help me in other ways."

"Yes," said the Beauty, triumphantly; "you can count on me. And I am happy and proud to be able to assist you. Come, let us go!"

"What! then *you* are not deserting me, like all the world! You will help

and advise me—an atom now to be cast upon great London!"

"I shall, at least, see you settled there. You shall not leave in discredit. I owe you too much, dear Mrs. Labouchere."

"How noble and generous of you!" she said, putting out her hand. "After all, there is a strange likeness in our lots! Come then; I am too unfriended now to refuse such aid."

With a proud look on his foolish face, as if he were a knight going to do battle for a high and pure lady in the old days of chivalry, he followed her as she left the room.

Aghast, struck down by these gathering horrors, as they seemed to her, Livy stood there, motionless. Such villainy to be in the world was

what she had never dreamed of. She heard the sound of wheels and went to the window, and there saw the pair seated in *her* carriage, the Beauty driving "that woman" away to the station!

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW HEROINE.

WHAT was Livy—what was any one—to do? Misery, ruin, degradation—what was there not before them? Death, indeed, would be sweet. And that dear one at home—was it to fall on her? Heaven send Livy inspiration!

She fled from that ill-omened—nay, accursed—house, not daring to look back; and got home—how she knew not. Her miserable mother, lying on the bed, despairing of everything, had been expecting her—longing for her,

hoping for *something*, her worldly soul having still a confidence in the power and strength of this young and unhackneyed creature, so simple and innocent. Her old training had all failed, her powers of acting were gone—it was scarcely worth the candle by which her long, long game had been played. What was life to her? And her very despair at being thus worsted made everything seem to her more miserable and humiliating than, perhaps, it was. There she lay on her sofa, the former *belle*, all hope fled. And it was there her daughter found her.

"Where is he?" were Mrs. Talbot's first words. "No, I see. What could you do, a child, weak and inexperienced?"

Mother and daughter were in a mo-

ment mingling tears and hysterical sobs.

"I shall bring him back yet, dearest," whispered Livy; "I feel a strange strength and confidence here. Something tells me I am not abandoned by all. Will you leave it to me? As yet I have done nothing. I have only met that cruel, wicked woman, who has openly threatened us. Oh, dearest, leave it all to me. She has roused a spirit in me that will save us all yet!"

"My darling, what can you do? This is sent to me as a chastisement for all my old follies, and my foolish life spent in the childish triumphs of fashion. No; it is useless struggling. I can only submit, and accept what is sent me. I am ill, too. They used

to laugh at me, when I talked of my nerves; but my whole body is wrung, and tortured, and quivering. Would to God I was out of it, and at rest!"

"Ill, dearest? You do not feel ill? We must have the doctor."

There was, indeed, a strange, worn, and fretted look in her face, that spoke of illness, and that scared the daughter. Still she knew that the true physician and the only cure, was to be found by her, and to be found in happiness and peace of mind.

"Trust in me," she said; "and for this once. I am weak, I know; but I am beginning to find out where my strength is. Just wait for one day. Let me leave you till evening, and then —we shall see!"

"Do what you will, dearest. What

can I say or advise? For now I begin to see that my old elaborate wisdom is nothing but sheer folly, after all. I have little hope in anything now. But go, dearest!"

In a few minutes, Livy—our new heroine—had her bonnet on, her maid equipped, and they were driving to the station "to catch the train," she in a flutter, full of the grand designs that were before her. She was so engrossed with these, that she did not notice an acquaintance—a gentleman whom she had met before, at The Towers, and whom the flush on her cheeks, the excited sparkle in her eyes, at once attracted. He had got out of the train which had crossed the other at that place, and he suddenly went and entered the one that was returning to

town. The gentlemanly station-master had put her in a carriage with other ladies, and the gentleman came and required to have the door opened for him.

"Oh, I know this young lady," he said.

Livy recollected Colonel Fotheringham at once. He then began to talk, and in a very agreeable and seductive way; and, indeed, no one had such practice as he had in that art, or had so improved with that practice. And he had a valuable way of inducing confidence, for he was a man of the world, and who knew the world, as Livy—half timorous, half reverential to such—soon found out and felt; and at that moment she felt so helpless, lone, and deserted, that any one, who had

the air of being powerful enough to control and direct it to his own ends, seemed to her more than mortal. He had the art, too, of assuming an air of deep interest, with those to whom he spoke, in their future—a sort of indescribable, half timorous air, which had the best effect. Our Livy, so valiant against the open hostility of one of her own sex, and so shrewd to see the covert approaches of a crafty enemy, was quite simple in presence of this skilled adversary, and felt herself irresistibly drawn to him, especially when he began on that one subject, having come round to it by artful degrees.

"I don't know your father *very* well," he said, smiling; "part of our acquaintance having been made under

very awkward circumstances. But I found afterwards—and will ask you to tell him so—that the little quarrel we had was not altogether one to ourselves. It was ingeniously contrived by another. But to you I should not speak of this. By the way, what do you think of your future sister-in-law, Mrs. Labouchere?"

"No," said Livy, vehemently, "never! That is not to be, I am glad to say; we shall never call her that!"

"I would not be too sure; she is so clever, and if she lays her mind to it, she could bring that about again. Forgive me, I know I am talking of very private family matters. And I declare to you, *she* keeps no secresy in the matter, and speaks in the freest

way, as you can guess. I never met so restless and artful—if that is not too unpolite a word—a woman."

There was a great struggle going on in Livy. She felt that this man knew much, much more than she did. She would have given the world to talk to him, to ask him questions. But then her pride; it seemed degrading. Yet, after all, he had behaved handsomely to her father, he seemed "good-natured"—to a young girl the most recommendatory of gifts. And then there was so much at stake.

"But why should you caution me?" she went on, "have you heard anything?"

"God bless me, no;" he said, smiling. "But the world has. At clubs everything is talked of, schemes and boasts of

all kinds. I know what her boast is, but I would not tell you, Miss Talbot, for the world. I may tell you this, though; she does not think her work finished as yet."

It was impossible to misunderstand this ominous speech, which he made so significantly.

"For a woman," he went on, "she has more power than any woman I ever met; that is, for carrying out whatever she plans. I should not like to make her an enemy myself; and if there was any one, old or young, in whom I took an interest, and whom I would not see injured or made unhappy, I would give them the same advice. You will not be angry with me, Miss Olivia, for saying this to you, for the matter is a little serious."

For a moment she felt indignant that this comparative stranger should take on himself the duty of giving her advice, and she answered,

"We do not fear anything of the kind, Colonel Fotheringham, and want no advice."

"I *do* beg your pardon," he said, hurriedly. "I see I *did* obtrude. You must forgive me, for I meant no harm." On this he took out a book and withdrew a little.

Livy was soon penitent and full of compunction. Worse, she felt that she had done a *stupid* thing. Here was one that might have been sent by Providence, though, indeed, this seemed paying it a bad compliment in its choice of messengers, to help her out of their difficulties.

"If you would let me advise you," he said, in what seemed to her a quiet tenderness, "I would be very much on my guard. I know that lady well, and all about her, and am as certain as that I stand here she means mischief, and mischief—forgive me saying so—that *you* cannot hinder. My friend, my *new* friend, Talbot, cannot either; and, I am afraid, is not inclined."

Livy felt there was truth in every word of those dark prophecies — the difficulties she saw, were crowding on her, and almost involuntarily she cried out, with the most piteous, tearful, and interesting expressions in the world.

"Oh, then, what *are* we to do?"

"Have you no grave and wise friend, no man of the world that you could consult? I do not offer myself, for I

am the merest acquaintance, and I was snubbed when I got on dangerous ground a few moments ago. Perhaps you are going to town now; but I am too inquisitive."

Livy, reflecting that after all she did want help, and cruelly, and that there might be no harm in accepting it, even from this unexpected quarter—at all events, she could listen, and need not be bound by it, after the train had reached the station — faltered out an eager question,

"What could she do? For, indeed, Colonel Fotheringham, we are all very unhappy."

He looked out of the window and smiled to himself. He was always successful—except with Mrs. Fotheringham.

"You see," he went on, "women of her class live always for amusement and excitement. They must have it. They think it a feather in their caps, as it is called, to make conquests, and, once they have begun, they must go through with it. Now, this lady's game, I am sorry to say,—indeed, you must have seen it yourself,—is to make a sort of trophy of your father, exhibit him in town, quite take him away from your mamma. It is something to boast of, and will add to her reputation. Excuse me for speaking so freely, but she does not care a straw for him."

Livy blushed as she listened to this plain way of putting the thing.

"Papa," she faltered, "does not believe that. Nothing could get him

to believe it. He thinks she is his true friend, and is devoted to him, and this gives her a sort of influence. He is so grateful."

Again the same smile passed over his face, and a twinkle of triumph came into it, as a sudden thought occurred to him.

"I could open his eyes," he said, slowly. "I might have it in my power to show him her true opinion of him. But that, of course, would be out of the question. Here is the ticket-collector. How quickly the time has gone? You will not return, I suppose, until the last train."

"But," said Livy, with almost passionate earnestness, "you will tell me that, and prove it. Oh, I am sure you won't refuse me. If we

could only open papa's eyes; he is so good."

Here she stopped. Again she felt all this was so humiliating, to be debating with a stranger—this humiliating attitude of her father, this justifying him, making him out not so bad, after all. She stopped, and hung down her head. The train had got into the station.

"Could I see you anywhere, you and your maid?" he asked. "Is there anything I could do; except what is disloyal, of course. She is a friend of mine, recollect, and though she has not treated me well, I cannot betray her. Where is he to drive to?"

"Half-moon Street," she said.

"Oh, I know," he said. "I often

go there. Old Dick Lumley's bachelor quarter. I hope I shall see you again soon, Miss Talbot."

CHAPTER X.

THE COUNCIL.

NEVER was girl in such a state of excitement as our Livy, while the cab was driving to Half-moon Street. She was, indeed, going to consult that old physician, Dick Lumley, possibly an ignorant practitioner, certainly a selfish one, who was not likely to give advice without fees; that is to say, who would not sacrifice anything to help a fellow creature. Sacrificing *anything*, with him, was giving away a scrap of his life; because it involved a disappointment, or worry, or stu-

pidity, and, therefore, *injured* the current of his life. For at his age, any mental injury or wear was as dangerous as anything bodily. Poor Old Dick!

People were fond of noticing now that he was changing, angry at having had so often to acknowledge that he had so long falsified all their declarations; that "he was going," or "breaking up," or down. It was amazing, indeed, how he clung to what he called life; that is, to that series of visits, dinners, balls; and when these intermitted, how his pulse seemed to intermit also. Life had, of late, been going very pleasantly with him; as, indeed, his perseverance deserved some recompense. Such unwearied, laborious, pushing efforts, made at the be-

ginning of his long life, and duly sustained, should have landed him in any office or station. But the fatal principle of the Sibylline books applies with its greatest force to what are votaries of fashion, to the children of the world—by the world, meaning dinner-parties, the knowing people of title, and being asked where "every-body" is asked.

As the books of Old Dick Lumley were burned, one by one, what remained increased in value with alarming proportion; and, finally, it was come to this—that at the end of that long ill-paved road, which had been his life, a few yards were as precious to him as miles of the pleasant grass swards over which he had tripped so carelessly when he began to walk.

He seemed to himself now, with the end of his days at hand, to be only beginning. He had this refutation, at least, of the vulgar speech "he is so old!" within him; he felt strong, and a keener sense of enjoyment every day, and his will, and the necessity of "going out," helped him to do battle with, and keep in order, obstructive pains and aches.

As usual, he had, with an industry that never wearied, been harrowing and "stubbing" the fashionable ground; now writing notes, now calling, now telling his stories, now doing little trifles of service for old Lady Towler, or for Mrs. Mantower; contriving to lay those persons under trifling social obligations, to be repaid only by "asking" him.

He was content to accept the smallest eleemosynary scrap of civility, a meagre cup of tea at five, sooner than be left out or not asked. Now, a certain duchess had a great gathering at Kedgeburn, whither all his friends were hurrying, and, after infinite "stubbing" he had received the invitation to join the august party, men and women of fashion—lords, dukes, a royal prince, in short a *battue*, the like of which he had never yet attended. It was elixir to his old frame, the very thought made his blood course more freely through those ancient conduits, his veins; and he was busy on this evening, furbishing up his old armour, looking where the joints had started, and wanted new riveting, amusing himself also by anticipation, burnishing

his jokes and good things, and filing up and polishing a neat, unobtrusive speech, which should delicately attract the royal personage. When his servant came up to say that a young lady was below, and wished to see him, he assumed, in his eagerness and flutter, that this must be some high-born dame come to wait on him.

"God bless me, who is it?" says Old Dick Lumley. "I'll go down to her—or would she step up? Is it Lady Craddock?"

It was amazing how Mr. Lumley could change and recover himself from the want of cohesion, and kind of tendency to fall to pieces. He was one man for the servant, another for the lady, who now entered, this frightened, fluttering, timorous Livy,

who had come to throw herself at the feet of the only friend in town she could think of. She knew he was selfish; but still, to her he had always a sort of gallant good-nature, which might be worked into kindness, if no great pressure was put upon it.

He was a little disappointed when he saw her; he had put himself together for a lady of title.

"My dear Miss Livy, this is an honour to my poor bachelor hovel. Come to see me here!" But he added hastily, sharp enough to see that something would be required of him, "You see me all in a fuss; just setting off on one of those gay junketings. They will have me. The duchess wrote in the nicest, kindest way, herself."

"Oh, and you are going away now—

and I was going to ask you—the only friend I could turn to!"

His first thought was that "this sort of thing" had been the introduction to a very favourite demand on him, and a look of alarm came into his face. Old Dick Lumley never gave money to anyone. There was something, he thought, very low in people, in *real distress*, coming to beg loans, and he could see little difference between them and people in the street. Of course it was a wholly different thing when Lord A—— said "Lend me a fiver, Lumley," which was only a pleasant civility, and the payment certain as the Bank.

Livy soon reassured him.

"Oh, dear Mr. Lumley, give me some advice; help us! We are in a

miserable way at home. Save us!"

"Oh, I suspect," said Mr. Lumley. "I suppose our friend, the Beauty, is at his old tricks. Sit down, then, and take a chair, and tell me all about it. There."

"No, indeed, it's not his fault. But there are others who hate poor mamma, and do their best to draw him away from us."

"Oh, I know that, too. A very clever woman in her way — I really admire her. But now, tell me how things stand exactly."

He put aside his preparations, and set himself to listen. Livy began, told him all; coming down to the dreadful and perplexed state in which things were. It was, indeed, hard to resist Livy's "coaxing manner," which invited

confidence and aid. As she went on he grew interested, and stopped his packing.

"Oh, Beauty," he would say, "fie for shame! And yet I don't blame him. All that scheming woman. I know well what she's at. It's just one of the tricks of the women of the day. Lord bless you, my dear child, it's their amusement — like dram-drinking to a man that has taken to cognac. You see what is there open to women of this sort? What is there piquant but something of the kind? I declare, I know I shouldn't speak this way to you; but it's the fact, I assure you. The world's a very wicked place."

Livy was aghast.

"But why," she cried, "why should she think of this—such a cruel, base

revenge? What can she gain? Poor papa is married——"

"*Raison de plus*," says Dick, gaily. "Married men are the best game, and give a *prestige*, you see. It is bringing down two birds; and, as you see, in this case, three."

Livy was beginning to see.

"Then what, in the name of heaven, are we to do? How can I go back to mamma? I told her I would bring her comfort, and now I see I have worse news."

Dick was really getting sympathetic. With the pretty he was always more or less good-natured. Beside, there were the elements of a capital story, which, with a little vamping and varnishing, would make his fortune at Kedgeburn. He was curious, too, to see the end.

Anything dramatic for the old soul was like breathing fresh air. He thought a moment.

"I'd have supposed that Fotheringham was her admirer, and she his. And I daresay he is still."

"Oh, I know that he is not," she said, eagerly. "He came up in the train with me, and spoke very kindly indeed."

"Oh, you were consulting *him*, Miss Livy. A nice man to take into confidence. Well, I don't know but that you were sensible enough: all's fair in love, war, or filial affection. And now tell me, my dear, what did Fotheringham say to you? Don't be afraid. I assure you it is of great importance."

"Well, he was very kind and interested—I must say that."

"Of course he was; but was he friendly to her?"

"No; he seemed angry or displeased."

"Ah! a point for you. Now I tell you, as you have come to me, that man is the only chance you have. If you can make him your friend, you can do something. And your father has gone up to town with her? You don't know where they are quartered, do you?"

"Oh, no," she said desparingly. "In this great London, how should one—"

"Well, I do. Starridge's is the place. Decent family hotel. Lord Mundy always stops there. Comfortable, but dear. I tell you what, I was going to Kedgeburn the first

thing in the morning; but a few hours will not make much difference. I can go by the evening train. See, my dear. You might just wait here a little while, till I come back. There are plenty of books, and the evening paper."

Old Dick Lumley got his hat, and set off. It was a long time since he had done so generous and unselfish an act. But he felt a new eagerness, which contributed a sort of elixir vitæ to his veins. He tottered into a Hansom cab, with as much elasticity as he could assume, and drove away to his club "Banks'"—where he was certain of finding Colonel Fotheringham.

That gentleman was there, as he had anticipated, standing in the bow

window, entertaining a number of fast gentlemen with some piquant adventure. "Banks'" was a sort of fly-by-night house, where deep card-playing always went on, and which seemed to run eternally with soda and brandy, as other places are said to run with milk and honey. On these grounds, Old Dick belonged to it, as he never cast his net into its waters for gossip without a good haul, which he could carry to his favourite Lady This, or to "My dear Mrs. ——." This communion, too, with young and "fast" men, was one of the conduit pipes through which Mr. Lumley fancied he drank of the Fountain of Youth, and, indeed, of Life. This noisy party, then, he joined, after a way of his own: a conscious smile of anticipating

enjoyment—sidling up until he was absorbed in the group.

Some of these men were officers, who had been quartered abroad; and one was apparently joking Colonel Fotheringham on that point where men of all kinds, degrees, and ages, it is to be suspected, enjoy being "rallied" —namely, what are called their "successes."

"I saw you," said this gentleman. "He was getting out of the carriage with as pretty a girl as you'd ask to meet. The man is lost to all shame. But it won't do."

"Won't do! How do you know?"

"Well, what about the pretty widow? She followed you from abroad. What account have you to give of her? God knows you boasted enough."

"All in good time," said the Adonis, complacently. "I wait always till the pear is ripe; then open my mouth, and it drops into it."

"Won't do shaking the tree," said Old Lumley, thus introducing himself. "But there is another reason, Fothy. Why don't you tell them that she has a little game of her own to finish first?

'Pon my soul, as diverting a thing as you ever heard. Would do for a little French piece at the Palais Royal."

"Oh, I know," said Fotheringham. "That poor creature that they call, or who calls himself, the Beauty—an ass of the first water. I can call him so, now that we have made up our little quarrel."

"Ah, you are sore about that,

Fothy," said Mr. Lumley. "For a handsome fellow like you, with the scalps of so many wives, maids, and mothers dangling at your belt, it is mortifying to play second fiddle to a Jemmy Jessamy of that kind."

"I beg your pardon, Lumley," said the other, pettishly. "Excuse me, you are talking of what you know nothing about. It is notorious that she doesn't care two straws about the fellow. My good Old Lumley, you are not behind the scenes everywhere. You are not quite up to this business. She keeps me posted up in every stage of the affair. A woman of her sort only lives for excitement; and what is at the bottom of the whole affair is dislike to another person."

"Very good—very good, no doubt,"

said old Dick, "so far as your statement goes. But I should like proofs."

"Proofs! A gentleman does not usually show a lady's letter. But," he added, taking one out of his pocket, "if I chose to exhibit *one*—which I should scorn to do—it would prove what I said. Why, she laughs at the fellow, and turns him into the greatest ridicule."

Now, clever as Mr. Lumley was, and well acquainted with the world as he was, and with the tricks of the world, it must be owned that this little episode was brought about by no contrivances on his part. He had raised the argument unintentionally; perhaps with a sort of hope of "picking up" something out of it. When he heard this

allusion to a letter, he was, of course, convinced; and said that made it quite a different thing. And Colonel Fotheringham was quite triumphant.

Gradually the group broke up; and Mr. Lumley was thinking of returning to his lodgings, when Colonel Fotheringham followed him, and seemed anxious to speak with him.

"You see," he said, "this artful woman is playing a game; and I am sorry for the poor little girl."

"But, really now," said Old Dick, "about the letter? I couldn't, of course, dispute what you said before those fellows."

"Oh, I could show it to you," said Colonel Fotheringham. "I assure you, she turns this half natural into perfect ridicule. A very clever woman; but

I would not trust her *that* far. It is so amusing, the way she hates that poor, foolish woman. She'd see her in the workhouse with pleasure. And that pretty little girl, with her praying-sort of face! I never met such a confidential little nun of a thing. She told me all her sorrows; and I am to comfort her and the family. I intend going down to pay them a visit to-morrow. Eh, Lumley?"

Old Dick chuckled with sympathising enjoyment at whatever this speech seemed to convey: then went his way back to his lodgings. He thought the matter over with satisfaction as he drove along, and said to himself, "Not badly done." The story would work up very dramatically for my lord duke after dinner, and cause the whole atten-

tion of the company to be drawn to him. People would never think of "age" in connection with Dick.

CHAPTER XI.

CHANGE OF HAND.

When he got back, he found the devotional face, which Colonel Fotheringham had been so struck with, bent on him wistfully, with a despairing inquiry,—

"What have you done? Do you bring me hope?"

"What could be done in the time, my dear child? Things of this kind cannot be settled right off in that way. We must prepare the ground, my dear."

Her face fell.

"Oh, I know that, dear Mr. Lumley; but I had hoped you would have made out something. I have been so miserable."

"Well, I don't say but that I *have* made out something. But now, you must work a little for yourself, and build upon the little foundation I have laid. You are very clever in your own way, my dear. Now, Fotheringham is not a man whose intimacy is to be encouraged; in fact, he is a fellow who ought not to be let into a decent house. But don't be shocked; I think there would be no harm if you made a friend of him."

This strange advice Old Dick inculcated warmly.

"He is going to see you to-morrow.

Make yourself as bewitching as you can, and he will not refuse you anything."

"But I *could* not ask such a man. It was only an accident, my meeting him in the train."

"It would be the only way to open the Beauty's eyes. You see, my dear child, you must work for yourself. No one can ever do anything for any one, so well as they can do it for themselves. I believe you to be very clever, Miss Livy; and, with a little training, you would hold your own against any of these scheming women. The only real way to meet them, is to face them on their own ground, and with their own weapons."

"I never could bring myself to *that*," said Livy, vehemently; "but papa is

good at heart, I know he is; and if I knew how to reach his feelings! He loves us all, I know he does."

"Well, then, let us go to him. I'll do what I can with him, too. We are sure to find him at Starridge's, her place."

Livy shuddered as he said this; but she caught at the proposal eagerly: and, in a few moments, they were driving away to that fashionable family hotel, where invited foreign princes—in the dearth of accommodation at the palaces of the kingdom — have been often hospitably entertained.

Mr. Lumley knew "Starridge," whose real name was Motcombe, very well, having often dined there. Indeed, Mr. Lumley was one of those people who have a lucky art of becoming known to

every one without exertion of their own—one of those who are recognised by policemen, allowed to pass into reserved places, &c., and yet from whom money is not looked for. With this proprietor Old Dick was presently in deep conversation, and learned that Mrs. Labouchere had arrived there with all her boxes, &c., but that she had gone out, and had not come in yet; but that the gentleman was waiting upstairs. Mr. Lumley and his charge then went up.

The Beauty started as he saw them, much as a school-boy would, detected by the master, in an orchard. But after a moment he grew pettish, then defiant.

"What do you want with me? What is the meaning of this pursuing

me about, in this way? How dare you come after me?"

This was to his daughter.

"Oh, papa, what are you doing? Why have you done this?"

"Oh, I say, Talbot, these are very queer pranks! It must be a joke, altogether. You can't have taken leave of your wits?"

"I don't understand you," said the Beauty.

"Oh, going about in this way. Here, be a sensible man, now. Go back with your daughter."

"I don't want directions from any one. Neither do I require any orders from home. I have business that keeps me here."

"Indeed you have not, my dear Talbot," said Old Dick, sitting down

in a comfortable sort of way. "I am an old friend, and don't at all mind what you say. You won't offend me easily."

"Oh, papa, if you knew the state I left mamma in! It will kill her, the way you are treating her."

"And how have *I* been treated all these years back? Tyrannised over—ground down—kept shut up——"

Mr. Lumley burst out laughing.

"What a description of yourself! No, my dear fellow; we can't accept *that* as a true picture; and I have too much respect for you to suppose that you would give out that you allowed yourself to have lived in such a 'degrading' state of hen-pecking."

The Beauty coloured.

"Oh, you are very sharp—uncom-

monly so. You know what I mean. I don't mean to be laughed at any longer by the world!"

A twinkle came into Mr. Lumley's eyes.

"I wouldn't be too sure of that. Our friends, unfortunately, are often those who laugh the loudest."

"Ah! but my friends don't do that. The friends *you* have been accustomed to, do so, no doubt. It is what I would quite expect."

"Perhaps you are right, though Mrs. Labouchere is not exactly one of the friends I have been much accustomed to."

The Beauty coloured.

"I'll not hear a word against that lady. I know well who sets these

slanders on foot. I have heard enough of them already."

"Oh, papa," cried Livy; "you don't know all. Your kind, good heart has been worked on for the basest ends. There are those who are using you to forward the ends of their own hate and dislike; and all the time laughing at you behind your back."

This was a daring speech for our Livy, and she trembled when she had made it.

The Beauty was beside himself with anger and offended dignity.

"What a mean conspiracy! You, and the rest of you, can stoop to invent things about the noblest of women! I forbid you to speak to me on this subject again; I won't have it. And if you don't both of you leave this

room, I'll leave it. You have no business to come here at all. It is Mrs. Labouchere's apartment."

"Here, my good friend," said Mr. Lumley, rising; "you are quite forgetting yourself, in this ardent championship. You used a very ugly word just now — something about 'conspiracy;' I don't allow expressions of this kind to be applied to me. I think it very free of you," added Dick Lumley, in a real rage; "and very uncalled for. Now explain what you mean. Don't dare to repeat that word again, or any words like it. Why, you *are* a stupid, foolish creature, not to know your best friends, those who would save you from being made a cat's-paw of by a scheming woman, whose letters—where she is laughing at

you to her friends—are being hawked about over the clubs!"

There was something so genuine in this tone of Dick Lumley, such an air of superior knowledge, that it did more in one second to convince the Beauty of the facts thus affirmed, than if affidavits had been sworn with all solemnity. He faltered, and repeated —"*balbuitiéd*," as the French say; "Laugh at me in her letters?"

"Ah, you guess now," said Old Dick, still fuming. "Then you'll find out more by-and-by. Conspiracy, indeed! I'll just leave you there; make yourself as much a laughing-stock as you please. I'll never raise my finger to open your eyes. Come, Miss Livy; your father doesn't want you here, as he says plainly; and I'll see you safe

to the train. And if you take my advice, I'd leave the matter all to time. It is really not worth any extra trouble; and you have done your best, as a daughter, to save this poor, infatuated father of yours from being a laughing-stock."

Our Livy saw that this angry speech of Dick Lumley's had, unintentionally, done her more good than any of his elaborate little worldly plots. She saw her father mortified, angry, doubtful, and full of fear lest there might be some truth, after all, in that statement. She took the cue at once, like a girl of *esprit*, as she really was.

"Then we must go I suppose, Mr. Lumley," she said. "I have done my best, and so have you. We can do no more. We are to have this morti-

cation, in addition to other trials—to be laughed at by the whole town. My poor mother did not deserve this."

Uncertain, colouring up fast, turning pale, angry as a child whose only thought is to break up its toys to spite the parents who have bought them for it—the Beauty looked at them irresolutely. He felt his weakness. Weak minds, at such a crisis, can only find a temporary strength in repeating a foolish defiance. It gives them a *prestige* for the moment. And so he said again—

"I don't choose to be interfered with. I am not a child; and I'll show you that I am not. I won't hear a word against her."

"You are a disinterested fellow,"

said old Dick Lumley, laughing heartily. "You will deserve a crown."

He took Livy's arm in his, and they went down-stairs, she with her head bent low, and her heart very heavy. They got into the cab, and as Mr. Lumley was telling the cabman where to drive to, a lady who was going up the steps looked round curiously, and, seeing them, stopped for a moment, then came down the steps, and stood before them at the window.

It was Mrs. Labouchere.

"Oh, a visit !" she said. "Ha, I understand why ! Another failure, even with such an ally as Mr. Lumley ! There are great odds against poor me."

"My dear Mrs. Labouchere," said the old man of the world ; "you alone

are a match for the whole world. Miss Talbot had no escort, and——"

"Yes, I understand," she said, with bitter contempt. "Well, I have no escort either, and shall want one for some time. You see it won't do, Miss Olivia Talbot. Even in my absence, you can do nothing."

She passed in. Old Dick looked after her admiringly. He was actually thinking he had been a great fool to mix himself up in this business. After all, it did not concern him; and all the result was to make an enemy of a woman that was sure to "do"—to get on.

"Monstrous clever creature that," he said. "I admire her. You see, my dear, there's no use in our trying anything more. You've done what you

could; and she's a dangerous woman to meddle with. Let sleeping dogs lie. Our friend, the Beauty, will tire of this—er—fancy by-and-by, and then all will be right again. We must take men as we find them."

With a soreness of heart Livy found, for the first time, that conventional "hollowness of the world" realised to her. This ancient, whose foot was in the grave, was cold, selfish, unfeeling, and thought only of himself now; and, at the same time, felt that she ought to consider herself under a serious obligation to him for these services.

CHAPTER XII.

A GLEAM OF HOPE.

Livy got home about nine o'clock, and it was a miserable journey for her, down. Indeed, for a person with "something on their mind," there is no imprisonment so terrible as that of a railway carriage, which flies forward so swiftly, but with which the anxious, fluttering soul does not keep pace; and, indeed, now lags behind, now leaps forward, as if eager to leave the express carriage behind. It was terribly long for her, and she thought the journey

would never come to an end. When she entered there was no eager, expectant mother rushing to meet her; but a servant on tip-toe, with a "She is asleep now, miss. Oh, but she has been so ill!"

Livy stole up, almost thankful for this sleep, which saved her the misery of having to enter, and be the bearer of wretched news.

She saw the pale, worn face before her, all the colour gone; the old Chalon beauty turned haggard. Livy sat by her, and watched for more than an hour, when Mrs. Talbot roused herself and looked round, and her eyes fell upon Livy, and she started.

"Well, dear," she cried, "where is he? You have brought him to me? No?"

Then Livy had to tell her poor halting story; and who shall blame her if her desperation made her put in such colouring as there was not in nature, to make the whole have something of a more promising aspect. The woman of the world understood better, and shook her head mournfully.

"I expected nothing, dearest. You did your best. After all, as I have been thinking since, why should I put on a pretence of affection in the matter; why should I try and act a part to you, my own child, who know well that this is all mortification at being worsted by that woman, or at finding one whom I have ruled so long, breaking at last from my control? At least this is what the world will say, and the world will be nearly right; for I have been always

a worldling, and it is fit that I should be dealt with as one."

Ever since Livy had left the hotel, and noted the change in her father—and there was a change in her, too; for all the delicate bloom, which was like the precious green on bronze, was being rubbed away—that curious hint of Old Dick Lumley's had been in her ear. It seemed like an inspiration. All pleading, importunity, and appeals to love and affection and sympathy were thrown away. Those delicate "sweet waters" were turned back, and played on an iron-bound rock, rising smooth and sheer. Already, though, that little head was fluttering with a new scheme that seemed to her all but infallible in result—certain to succeed, if it could only be brought into effect.

A miserable night for both. The mother seemed sunk into a hopeless stupor, and lay there on the sofa. She would not go to bed. The hours wore on to eleven, then to midnight, and Livy was tearfully imploring, beseeching her to lie down. "We would see in the morning." Vain and oft-repeated bit of sham comfort! the friendly night interposing, as a wall, with the poor comfort of delay, as though some friendly genii would arise and bring about some wonderful change!

At last she was prevailed on; and she was going up when they heard the gate bell ring. In a moment the Beauty entered, and with an air half-hang dog, half-defiant, as if brought to bay, sulky to a degree, confronted the

two ladies. Livy, when she heard the bell, had just time to pour out an eager whisper into her mother's ear.

"Now, all depends on this, dearest. It is our last chance. I implore you be guided by me in this. Promise me."

It acted on Mrs. Talbot like an inspiration; and the Beauty saw before him his wife and daughter, calm and smiling. Mrs. Talbot had *acted* many a time before, under far more difficult circumstances.

"We understood you were not returning to-night," she said, almost gaily.

"So you told me, dearest," said Livy, gently; "and I told mamma so."

"You don't seem very certain in your movements," said his wife, smiling.

"Well, you needn't have *sent* after me," said the Beauty, wondering at this tone. He was prepared for a tremendous tempest. "I don't like it, and I won't have it."

"Certainly not; it looks bad before people. Livy insisted on going up to town."

"Yes, and bringing off that man to the hotel after me, as if I was a schoolboy."

"No, indeed, dear Beauty," said Livy, eagerly. "It was Mr. Lumley who had heard some club story, and wished to tell you himself."

He glanced angrily and nervously at his wife. A look of intelligence

came from Livy's face to reassure him. She had not told her mother. What if she had? He was not to be brought to book for everything. Besides it was all "a *lie*" or a mistake; so he could have told them.

"I really don't understand," said his wife. "I sent nobody after you. This is all a tissue of mistakes. We understood that you were not returning to-night. You have changed your mind: why make a fuss about it?"

The Beauty did not relish this tone, and was not a little confounded. He was in a very bad humour indeed. His faith had been rudely shaken. He went out of the room angrily, and went to bed, leaving the two women there.

It was a wretched, sleepless night for

them. In the morning the Beauty appeared with quite a load of injuries on him. He was in real trouble and vexation of spirit, mortified ; and, after all, believing that the two ladies knew well what was disturbing him. The little faint success of the night before had inspirited them ; and Mrs. Talbot, ill at heart, and with an old malady born of her old campaigns, and which she had carried about with her gallantly, much as a veteran would a ball in the leg, had been tortured by it secretly and without a complaint. Only at times of crisis this private enemy ungenerously came out, and added to her torments. This was "something in her side," which many of her friends knew indistinctly by that title. But of late, agitation and the sense of fail-

ing years, and decay, coming on her, had robbed her of some of her old strength for doing battle with such enemies.

The Beauty mooned about, undecided, all the morning. It was evident that some dispute had taken place between him and the lady he so admired, and that his sense of dignity kept him undecided. When he found the ladies of his family dressed, as if for guests, he asked Livy pettishly what they were going to do.

She looked at him with "a cold eye," and which seemed to be a new weapon of hers since the day that she had so boldly faced him.

"Colonel Fotheringham is coming down here to lunch."

"Coming down here?" he repeated

with astonishment. "What do you mean by this? Such a man as that! I don't choose to have a man of his sort in this house."

"It is mamma's wish," said Livy coldly. "Surely you would not oppose her in so trifling a matter?"

"It is not trifling—a man of that character!"

Mrs. Talbot entered now, and he repeated his disapproval.

"I don't choose to have a man of that sort in my house."

"He is the friend of your great friend, Mrs. Labouchere. That ought to be no objection in your eyes."

"That is nothing to me, or to you."

"Nothing to me?" said the lady, growing excited. Livy at once struck in.

"You cannot mean that. You must be just and reasonable. If you deny mamma's right to interfere with your choice of friends, you must allow her the same indulgence."

"Yes," said Mrs. Talbot growing more excited, "as I have borne so much from you, it is time I should get back some liberty."

"O come, I won't be lectured, you are making quite a fool of yourself!"

Livy stepped forward and said, with the coldest contempt—

"You must not speak in this way to my mother. She is too good to you, and has suffered too much. All that must be changed now. It must indeed."

"Must!" repeated the Beauty, astonished.

"Yes, must. She is entitled to be treated *as a lady*, at least. 'A fool!' shame on you to let such words pass your lips. Never fear, dearest, I shall protect you from the effects of your own good nature. If you are not treated with respect in this house—your own house—we shall go out of it. There are plenty of places abroad, plenty of friends who will be glad to welcome us; and when this folly of papa's has passed over—and it will be a short-lived one—and he has come back to his own old gentlemanly self, we shall come back too. But you must not be insulted here."

The Beauty had found a new schoolmistress. He could only murmur—"I *didn't* insult her—I never meant it—it's absurd."

"If you never meant it, then, of course mamma will think no more of it. Here is Colonel Fotheringham."

CHAPTER XIII.

A DUEL.

The Colonel entered with a curiously amused expression. He saw from the attitude of all the party that something dramatic was taking place—the nature of which he readily guessed. Livy's eyes glittered, and her cheeks coloured, as he appeared; for she had begun to look on this man as one about whom might seem to hover a mysterious influence. Instantly a change came over the whole party; they became the people of society and fashion again; and that *débris* of sorrow, passion,

desertion, misery, which had covered the place a few minutes before, was all decently swept away. It was as though some superior officer had come along the disordered ranks, and, in his presence, all order had been restored. Mr. Fotheringham felt that he was such an officer, and that he had the command of the situation virtually in his own hands.

He talked away gaily of the usual topics. Under the politely attentive faces about him, no one would have guessed that there were panting hearts beneath, eagerly anxious, and longing to use the new comer for their ends. Colonel Fotheringham knew all this. He began at once.

"I breakfasted at Starridge's," he said to the Beauty, "with a great

friend of yours — Mrs. Labouchere. She was kind enough to ask me—"

The Beauty started. "Oh, with *her?*" he said, confusedly.

"When I say a great friend," went on the Colonel, laughing, "I mean she *was* a great friend. She was in great spirits and good humour. I never saw her so full of fun, as they say, and so ready to turn people into ridicule."

Livy struck in at once—"She would not do that to us, I suppose. She has finished with us by this time, I hope."

"Oh, yes," he said, "she spared the ladies. No, it was some one else. I stood up for the absent, I assure you."

"I understand all this," said the

Beauty, fuming, and walking about angrily, "I know what it means, and who has arranged all this. If Mrs. Labouchere be angry with me——"

"Angry with you?" repeated his pale wife, unable to restrain herself, "she angry with you?"

"Yes, I know very well how it has been done. It is all a plot. I believe you are all joined in it."

"A plot!" said Colonel Fotheringham, with dignity, "I do not join in plots, Sir. It is not among the many sins laid to my account."

"No; Mr. Talbot is talking very strangely of late," said his wife, "and forgets——"

"Oh, I understand it very well," went on the Beauty, in a rage; "it didn't suit that I should have a friend

that really liked me, and that was good to me. I know about 'wheels within wheels,' but I don't believe it. There's an object in all this."

"Hush, hush, papa," said Livy, "and remember we are not alone."

"Oh, this is a public matter," said he, with an attempt at weight and dignity; "excuse me, it must be cleared up. Grave charges have been made affecting the character of an *absent lady*, and *mine also*. I am very glad Colonel Fotheringham is here. He is a gentleman, and I am sure states candidly what are the facts. It is due to myself, and to *the lady concerned*."

Oh, what humiliation for our Livy! And yet there was something absurd in these heroics. It did not really amount

to anything of gravity. The Beauty went on—

"Grave charges have been made; a lady whom I esteem, and have the highest regard and respect for—who is as pure and noble-minded a person as there exists on this earth—that this lady, I say, has spoken of me in a letter to you, Colonel Fotheringham, behind my back, in the most contemptuous way."

"Oh, father!" said Livy, "don't, don't; spare us; what will this gentleman think of us?"

"We will leave it," said Colonel Fotheringham, now grown very pale, "please leave it as it is; I cannot bear this. No charge is made; if there was anything said, it is withdrawn. I implore you——"

The Beanty took this for a sign of victory. He was very clever. He had brought them to bay. They were afraid. They dared not substantiate the matter.

"Not at all," he said, in triumph, "we are not going to dispose of the matter in that way. I ask Colonel Fotheringham, distinctly, and as a gentleman, I am sure he will answer me—in fact, things have come to this pass—it is his duty to give me an answer. Is it a fact that he received any letter about me, or in which any terms of ridicule were used about me? There."

The Colonel shook his head.

"I thought so. It is scandalous taking away people's characters in ——"

"Stop, stop!" said the Colonel, coolly, "take care, do, what you are saying. You are surely not conveying that any one of your family would invent such a statement; or, say that I told them such a thing, when I did not?"

"Oh, of course not," said the Beauty, hesitating, "but there are such mistakes and exaggerations."

"No, no, it was a distinct statement. Well, then, do you mean to convey, that if it be true I stated such a thing to these ladies, that I should have invented or exaggerated, as you call it; come?"

This was a poser for the Beauty. He paused, and then looked from one to the other angrily. Still he never wanted for courage, and thus pushed

to the wall, but pouting, answered bluntly—

"Well, since you wish to know, I do doubt it."

"Doubt it, Sir? Doubt my word?"

"You have said nothing. I don't meddle with that or with you at all; I don't want it. All I say is, I won't have a lady calumniated. She would never say a word against me."

The Colonel was now growing excited in his turn.

"I am not accustomed," he said, "to hear such things repeated. Again I must call on you to state plainly, do you accuse me of inventing this matter?"

Thus brought to bay, the Beauty said—

"Well, I don't say that; but I say

this — I don't believe, without proof, what is said about Mrs. Labouchere."

The Colonel laughed, and put his hand in his pocket.

"You have required this yourself," he said.

"I don't care how you put it; I don't believe it. There. I think it is a slander against Mrs. Labouchere."

Colonel Fotheringham was a spiteful man. He never could resist the opportunity of "putting down" another man. Here was an opportunity.

"You are not a wise man or a brilliant man, Talbot," he said. "You must begin your education in the world. Much *you* know! But how can I prove it to you? It is very awkward —you won't like it; but as you throw it on me—I have a certain letter here;

and as you have doubted my word, I am bound to substantiate it. It is a little mortifying for you, but you will have it."

With a strange smile the Colonel put his hand into his pocket, and, forgetting all his propriety and honour for a moment, drew out the letter from his pocket. The Beauty trembled with rage and mortification. But still he stumbled on a good retort.

"What, you show a private letter! That is an honourable and gentlemanly thing!"

The Colonel hesitated. Then Livy struck in, fearful that her only chance was going to be lost.

"Show it to him, Colonel Fotheringham. You know you promised me."

But Colonel Fotheringham was ob-

durate. At this moment lunch was announced. This was a diversion. In presence of that matter-of-fact incident of life, all the earnestness and tragedy of the situation melted away. With the cutlets and potted meats, how was it possible to keep up with the grand tragic elements of life? And so the ladies and gentlemen of this situation passed into the dining-room, and the servant attended, and helped sherry round; and they talked of the last Academy exhibition, and of other indifferent matters.

After the lunch—during which Livy was very gay, though, indeed, with a forced sort of gaiety, while the Beauty took his food and drink, with a true characteristic sulkiness — Mrs. Talbot, very pale and worn, and still struggling

with illness, went away to her room. Livy said to her visitor,

"You must let me show you our garden, and my pet bed of flowers."

It was curious to see this veteran fowler, this deadly "shot"—so sure and pitiless—trying to adjust his aim at this gentle, innocent creature. Somehow, under that innocent gaze, he felt discomposed.

"So this is your pet bed of flowers?" he said. "Lucky flowers!"

"I don't know that," she said, acting coquetry. "They blow for me—they put out their prettiest leaves and blossoms for me—they are most compliant in every way, and do anything that I ask them. I am going to ask you, Colonel Fotheringham, to be as compliant as my flowers."

"If I am rewarded by having the same delightful adjectives applied to me, you would find me the same, Miss Olivia."

"I want to see that letter," she said, suddenly growing grave. "You see the state of things with us. There is no convincing our Beauty; no opening his pretty eyes. Just help me in this —oblige me: it will make us happy; and you will have done a real, friendly, generous thing. You will have made a poor rustic family like ours happy. I know he is good, really good, after all. Colonel Fotheringham, you would like to be able to look back to a really friendly and good-natured act? And as you are a man of the world, and always will live *in* the world, and will have very little of this sort of rustic

thing to think of, you may thank me for leaving you something of this sort to think over. And when we are far away, as we shall be soon, you will think of me, whom some people call 'Rustic,' in connection with this really kind and good-natured act."

"Going away!" he repeated. "You do not mean that you are leaving England?"

"Yes, I hope so. I long for a change, for mamma's sake. Her health requires it. She was always delicate, and, as the doctor said, had no nerves."

"And the Beauty, is he to be left behind?"

She paused. "That depends — on you, in some degree."

There was something so piteous, so

appealing, in this little speech of Livy's —something that so placed her outside of the category of women in which this man had counted all ladies of his acquaintance—something so firm and yet child-like—that he felt himself awed, and even reproached. There was something so winning in that sweet face, so tender and sacred, that he felt himself under a sort of irresistible spell, and with a sigh put the letter she wished for into her hand.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DEFEAT.

She flew upstairs to show her prize to her mother. As she reached the landing, she heard the sound of excited voices—husband and wife were having some frantic contest within. She stole away awe-stricken. She was not one of the greedy listeners, for whom anything of this sort becomes dramatic—more attractive than a play. She rather let down the curtain, and shrank away. They were strange voices—hysterical protestations—angry vituperations—voices raised high—

voices sunk low, and still lower. The Beauty had miraculously received some wonderful gift of boldness, but which was indeed not more than a delusive sense of strength in presence of weakness. Every moment he was growing stronger—more indignant, at the wrongs he had to put up with.

After this battle he returned moodily and fuming to his study, meeting his daughter on the way, who was coming hastily from the garden. There was a look of triumph in her eyes, and she waved her precious letter at him. "Now, papa, dear; read this. Only listen to these words,—'As for that Beauty, he is a mere ——'"

Our poor foolish Livy had not taken the wisest way, in legal phrase, to "get in her proofs." Were they writ-

ten in letters as large as those of a poster, it was hardly to be expected that his *amour propre* could endure such a refutation. He lost all patience.

"How dare you hunt me in this way? What do you mean by all of you trying to put me down. I tell you, you won't succeed. I don't believe a word of your stories; I know how you all hate her, and would do anything to destroy her. Even you are getting down a fellow like that—a man with the worst character in London—to take him into confidence: you, that set up to be well brought up! Now, just keep your letter—it's a forgery."

"It's true, it's true," cried the young girl. "O, papa, don't go on this way! Will nothing open your eyes?—will nothing bring you to your

senses? It will all end miserably, I know. You will have mamma's death on you."

The Beauty sneered. He was immensely excited.

"Much any of you cared for me all this time! Whatever happens it has not been my fault. I mean to be master here, in my house, never fear. I have done with all that.

Livy was not equal to this emergency. She had overrated her strength. Who could be expected to resist such evidence? And if her infatuated father would see nothing, know nothing, would be convinced of nothing; what struck her very heart with a chill was, that there was so much worse to come. What *was* to become of them? Even his face—ordinarily so quiet, so calmly

complaisant — seemed to have quite changed, and to have taken a vindictive, malicious, venomous look.

Was it some evil genius—some cruel Puck, that haunts houses, and causes little events to take place at the exact moment when (in conjunction with others) they can do the utmost mischief conceivable?—was it some such familiar who contrived that a letter should arrive at this precise moment for the Beauty? He gave a cry when he saw the writing, and tore it open. Livy turned pale; she had an instinct who this was from.

"There," he said, with an overwhelming sense of tritmph; "there is a Providential refutation of your calumnies! This noble and slandered woman! You should all go on your knees and

beg her pardon. How *dare* you attempt to take away the character of a pure and spotless lady. Listen to this" And he read aloud:—

"'I have decided on leaving England at once—you will guess the reason. No one shall say that *I* caused dissension in any family. Not that I could not carry on the battle with those who resort to the dishonourable weapons of calumny. You have spoken of some letter in which I wrote disparagingly of you. Perhaps I did; perhaps I did not. When you think to whom this letter was written—a man bankrupt in character, and one whom *no unmarried girl should be seen with for a second*, without exciting the worst suspicions——, but I say no more. This is a delicate matter.

"'Come and see me to-night for the last time. I spoke a little warmly last night; but I was hurt by your unkind suspicions. If it was shown to you, even in my own hand-writing, that I had spoken of you in *any* way, you should know me well enough by this time to disdain any such evidence. Any one that knew me thoroughly would believe me before the most convincing evidence in the world. I should not accept any story of you, in preference to what I know of your own nature. Come to me to-night. I count on you; for I want your aid, sympathy, and *advice* above all.'"

"There," cried the Beauty. "I am ashamed of myself for having listened to you so long!"

"You are not going," faltered Livy, in a faint voice. "You cannot do this."

"No power on earth shall detain me."

Livy could not restrain her scorn.

"You should take money with you then. She says she wants your aid."

"She shall have it then. Nothing that I can do could make up to her for the outrages I have allowed to be heaped on her from my house—from people that depend on me. I shall never forgive myself! Never, so long as I live!"

"Oh! but you have not heard what she said. O read! read! I conjure you!"

"Don't forget yourself," he answered. "How do I know what you and your mother have been at. You would

not scruple to carry out your designs."

"You must read it. There! take it—it will open your poor eyes."

"You are growing too impertinent," said the Beauty in a fury; and, taking the letter thus thrust on him, tore it up, and threw the pieces on the ground.

Livy gave a cry, and, turning, left the room. Her last chance seemed gone.

CHAPTER XV.

DALILAH.

THE Beauty remained pacing up and down full of joy and triumph. The world was indeed opening for him now. He was able to conquer his enemies—which they were—to take the management of events, which he had never done before. What time he had lost! Yes, he would go, would fly to that noble generous creature, who had so trusted him; even to show them that. It was growing intolerable, this constant interference; they must be reduced to order, and he must

assert himself. As he thought of all this, his eye fell upon the torn-up fragments lying on the ground. They would try to prove anything to him; they hated her so, they would think it no harm to make her write anything.

He took up a few of the pieces and looked at them intently. Yes, it was her writing, there could be no mistake, but then his eye fell on a most disagreeable and disturbing word, "Fribble." Yes, it was quite plain, "fribble," it was. He got some more of the pieces, and began reading what was on them, impelled by an overwhelming curiosity—but his was a woman's mind. Then he came on another disturbing word, "Empty-hea—." Finally he had gathered them all up carefully,

had taken them to his room, and spent a long time putting them laboriously together; no child's puzzle could have been more difficult. When he had done, he got up, tore the whole into smaller fragments still, and flung them out of the window. He was hot and angry.

"So this is the way she chooses to speak of me—never mind! O they are all the same—never mind, I shall make her feel."

There was a book of telegrams in the hall. In a moment he had filled up one with as indignant and cutting a protest as could be transmitted by the public agency of the telegraph:—

"I am not able to go to town, and wish you a pleasant voyage."

But at the same time he determined

not to give them the triumph of seeing that they were right. He would go up to town on business of his own. Yes, he would show them that he was not to be trampled on—what a wonderful deal of trampling that poor human nature bears so well? He was not going to be crushed by *every one*, he was very bitter about all that, and that she for whom he had done so much should have turned false—no matter, they should not have that triumph.

He had long since sent his telegram, and was getting ready to go upon his expedition, when his daughter came down again, with woe and misery in her face.

"Where are you going, papa dear," she said, quickly noticing his preparations, "not away, not up to town?"

"Yes! *must I ask for leave?*"

"She's not well—indeed she is not. I think we ought to send off for someone to see her, she is so weak and languid."

The Beauty laughed scornfully. He was pretty well up, as he thought, to these "tricks."

"Oh I know, I understand; oh she is very strong; she used to go to balls enough, and would bear any exertion. But why not send for a doctor if it is necessary?"

From the look of contempt which Livy gave him, he shrank away. His own daughter was beginning to despise him. Without a word she turned and left him, and yet he could not quite make up his mind what to do. And full of the deepest resentment, discon-

tented with all the world, and longing for some object—toy even, which he could crush and break, to show that he *had* power—he paced about till nearly five o'clock, not able to make up his mind as to what he was to do. Just at that time drove up the local doctor who attended them, and who went in a little hastily.

The Beauty smiled sarcastically. He knew these women very well; in their spite, this was a bit of acting to work on him. Some hysterics, to be magnified into serious illness, with speeches attendant, "Oh you must take care, it is very critical, &c." He was well accustomed to all *that*, to women's fancied illnesses, and he resented its being made an instrument for tyrannizing over him. When the doctor was

going away he came into Mr. Talbot's study, "I don't like the state of things upstairs at all. We must take care; nerves finely strung and all that—fever might supervene."

The Beauty looked at him scornfully. This was the old story. He had been duly primed upstairs.

"Of course, of course," he said, "I understand all that."

The doctor stared at him; he could not understand those glaring eyes.

"I am serious," he said, "we must really look to this, Mr. Talbot, your wife is in a critical way. She is excited, and must be soothed and kept quiet."

"Of course," said the Beauty, pettishly; "she is kept quiet in this house; every attention is paid to her here. What do you mean?"

The doctor again stared at him. At that moment a cab drove up to the door, and one of the porters belonging to the station jumped out, a letter was brought in; which the Beauty tore open eagerly. The doctor went his way wondering.

Livy had come down again, and. was standing before her father, pale and agitated. He was devouring the letter, every word of it, and she knew perfectly, though she could not see the writing, or whom it was from. The very hand-writing that he read was in his poor fatuous face.

"Come up, father," she said, she had latterly begun to call him by that formal and official name, "she is very ill, you have excited her and made her ill."

He was still reading; he was not listening. The letter ran—

"I have come down from London, and am waiting at the station to see you—if you will come to me. Say to the bearer that you will, or that you will not. A simple answer, yes or no, will be enough."

Livy, still excited, struck in—alas! injudiciously—

"You have not lost all humanity, or feeling, or duty? You dare receive such things, when she is ill and in peril?"

"I don't believe it," he said. "This is some of your tricks."

"Tricks! come up and see then! Poor mamma, she is ill indeed; and it is you who have made her so."

"Yes; put it on me! I am up to

that game by this time. I have business that takes me up to town."

"Takes you up to town! You would leave her in that state?"

"Oh, yes; I am up to all that. I'll find her perfectly well when I come back."

"You are lost to all decency. Go, then, I shall not detain you: and God forgive you!"

He was in a fever to get away, and yet was undecided. He felt some shame when she left him. He was not bad altogether; it was this miserable infatuation working on his vanity that was causing this moral cataract to spread over his eyes. A sort of shame and pity took possession of him, and he went up hesitating, and with soft steps. "At all events I can just see

her: though women's hysterics——"

But he caught the sound of voices, and his own name, uttered in excited tones——

"The blinded, empty creature; God forgive him! I despise him——"

It was enough. He turned, walked down stairs, got his hat, entered the cab, and was driven away.

CHAPTER XVI.

LIVY'S PLAN.

THERE was one up-stairs tending a poor wasted figure in the bed, who caught the sound of the wheels, and to whom it might have been as dismal and grating as the sound of the crumbled gravel under the wheels of a hearse, bearing away the remains of one whom she loved more than her own life. The ears of the sick lady were too dull to catch that fatal sound.

Her indefatigable child was ever ready, ever versatile where her amazing

affection was concerned, and which furnished her with arms, with devices, power, strength; nay, with *heart*, and a spirit that never flagged a moment. Here in this new disastrous state of things she was only nerved to more desperate exertion. Yet what could she do; what could she next turn to? In half an hour, or an hour, her mother would ask for him. What could she say? what excuse could she give? No subterfuge would avail; it *must* come out: and it did, after this fashion.

It was amazing what a change had come over the once famous lady of fashion, who within these few days seemed, as she lay there, like one who had received some terrible shock. Late in the evening she roused herself, and asked gently for *him*.

"He is gone out, mamma, dearest"—not knowing what to say.

"Where? When will he be back? After all, dear, do you know what I have been thinking? We have been too serious, too severe in the whole matter. I may have magnified it; I am a poor foolish sick woman. He looks at these things in his own way; it does not go beyond fancy, and it amuses him. When will he be back, dear?"

"Not till late, mamma, I fear. I think he had business in London."

"*Business in London!*"

Down toppled the little card house the poor lady had built up. A blankness fell upon both, but she said not a word. A little later she asked about some letter that was to have gone to

the post. A maid, who was fluttering about the room, struck in, eager to soothe her.

"It was late, m'm; but we gave it to the lady's cabman."

"The lady's cabman!" faltered Mrs. Talbot, raising herself up.

Alas! no ingenious prevarication could avail. What lady? what cab? It had all to come out. *A cab had been sent up from the station, by a lady who was waiting there*, and Mr. Talbot had gone away in it.

In vain the protests and signs of Livy; in vain her despairing pantomime to the foolish woman who had told all this story.

The unhappy lady gazed at the maid, then restrained herself a moment, and in a low suppressed voice, demanded

further details. There could be no further concealment—the telegram, the messenger, the cab, all was quietly investigated: Then she said:

"I see it all now. I know what this means. It is the beginning of the end."

Passionately our Livy strove to soothe her. With an ingenuity worthy of a special pleader, she invalidated every apparent argument that her unhappy mother clutched at, in desperation.

"It is that woman. I knew it from the beginning. *She is stronger than I am!* I ought to have known that from the first day. I made a feeble ineffectual struggle; but I was a poor ineffectual creature; no match for her. She is a wicked cruel *demon*, but she

is stronger than I am. I own it. She has won, and I have lost."

She was trembling all over, shaking and quivering; some new hysterical visitation was coming over her. Livy was aghast.

"It is not so much affection for him. I don't take the credit of that. Let any one who likes know it; it is mortification, and disappointment, not to be able to defeat a creature of that sort—a poor second-rate thing. Well may the world despise me."

She paused. Then went on again.

"What an infatuation! What a miserable, hopeless infatuation! There, he had it before him in black and white, and yet he would not believe his poor eyes. And yet, to get anything like the same result, no one

could guess all that I have gone through — the miserable struggle of many years — to secure not a tenth part of what this woman has done in a few weeks."

"Dearest mother, don't think of it: don't worry yourself, I implore of you."

"But others will think of it—talk of it—laugh at it! Don't you imagine that I have not old enemies of twenty years' time, who are still as envenomed against me as ever, and would do anything to mortify me; and would enjoy my mortification even after this long interval? I have insulted and trampled on them; and they would enjoy this revenge. Oh! I cannot endure the thought."

There was something so new, so

wild, so strange to Livy in this tone and excitement, that she gazed at her mother with something of terror. There was a *fresh* wildness, a new fire and shiftiness in her eyes which she had never noticed before. This dwelling on one subject had often, she had heard, produced some terrible result. The doctor's warning — "to soothe, to keep quiet"—came back on her. But how? No doctor's prescription could tell her. She felt herself utterly helpless — in utter despair!

It was now past five o'clock, and growing dark. She went on more excitedly still.

"Am I to sit down here patiently, and be trampled on—put up with any treatment — have the finger of scorn pointed at me? Never! I shall not

belie my whole life; I shall die struggling, as I have lived. Come, let us go. Let us follow, and bring him back."

"Mother! mother! what are you about? You will kill yourself. The doctor said you were not to think of such things."

In a wild, earnest way the mother said: "Let us go: go, and at once! Not a moment must be lost. It is only mercy to him. Let us set out at once, and bring him back."

"Oh, but mamma, how? You must not. It is too late now. He will be here: I know he will return."

There was a strange solemnity about Mrs. Talbot; a sort of wild earnestness, joined with power and determination, which quite alarmed her daughter. She

could not resist, and she felt that she could not resist, her purpose.

In a short time a fly from the village was at the door. The weeping Livy, looking at the pale, worn, ghastly face, almost fell on her knees to detain her. But there was a stern purpose in the mother's face there was no misunderstanding. Livy was helpless, and got into the carriage with her. The wondering servants stood at the door watching this mysterious departure, speculating and auguring the worst. "Missus was taking leave of her senses, going out at such a time of night."

At the station she almost fainted, but with indomitable resolution she rallied again. Long after, Livy recalled that weary transit in the railway carriage—the dull, damp and dusky blue

cushions, which gave the idea of a cell. Mrs. Talbot seemed lost in a sort of abstraction—her lips were compressed. There was no one in the compartment but the two ladies.

The journey seemed eternal—never coming to an end. And in the meantime it began to grow dark, and about half an hour from London the lamps were lighted, which gave a kind of mournful and lugubrious air to the interior of their blue cell.

Then they were on the platform, amid the crowd pushing past them, looking for luggage, with the cold evening air sweeping up the station, along the platform.

They got into a cab, and then, for the first time, the question occurred, "Where were they to go?"

Mrs. Talbot roused herself out of her reverie.

"You see, dearest," said her daughter, eagerly, "we shall not find him. How can we think of looking in this vast city—"

"For him? Let us seek *her*. I do not want *him*. Where does she live?"

This question was put fiercely, and determinedly.

"I want to meet *her*; for this night shall end the whole struggle, now and for ever! I cannot endure it longer."

In a faltering voice Livy said,

"She was at the hotel—Starridge's."

"Then drive to Starridge's."

They drove off to that well-known

and select family hotel. As they came up to the door, the light was reflected back from the shining plate-glass windows. A few carriages, sober and glittering in their windows, also stood by, to take away the owners. There was a Queen's ball that night, and various distinguished county families had come up to town, to Starridge's, to go to the solemnity. There were lights in many windows, where the young ladies were dressing. A blaze, as from a lantern came out from the hall, where servants were waiting.

"Was Mrs. Labouchere there?"

Yes, she was staying there; but was engaged.

"No matter. They must take up that name."

It was impossible. She was just

going away—to the Continent, by the night train.

Ah, she was flying—beaten—afraid to carry on the contest!

The sick lady looked over at her daughter with a sort of exultation. They were certain? No mistake? Well, they supposed so: there were her boxes coming down.

"No matter, I shall not trust her," said Mrs. Talbot, "I shall wait on her, and *must* see her too. She will think when she hears that I have been here, that I was afraid to meet her."

Livy did not answer her, did not hear her; in fact her whole heart and soul were absorbed by a figure which she saw in the hall, and recognized, a figure which had glided down, and

was busy over the trunks, and giving directions with a sort of fussiness—utterly unconscious that any domestic eyes were gazing on his movements. It was a truly dramatic situation. He had even an air of command, the old foolish bustle and importance—ordering the waiters about—it was a pitiable sight indeed for her.

But the whole anxiety and burden on her mind was the fear lest her mother should see, or catch a glimpse. At times his face was even turned full on the cab, in the glare of the light; but still she did not remark him. Something must be done, for she wished to get out, go upstairs and meet her enemy; when with a sudden thought, Livy said hurriedly.

"You must not go in, mother, you

cannot do it! In this place too. Or, at least, let me go in first, and then you can follow, if you wish."

As she spoke, she got out and entered. No one noticed the veiled young girl who had fluttered in so softly, and she heard her father giving words of command in his own old foolish and excited way.

"Here I say! Get down that trunk —we shall be late! *Has my portmanteau been got down?* See that it is labelled 'For Paris,' at the station."

"My portmanteau got down!" What were these terrible words that seemed to strike her full in the face, like blows of a club?

Was *he* going with her?

CHAPTER XVII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

He was in the shadow now, out of the glare of the light, so that he could not be seen from the street. She stepped lightly aside into a parlour that was open, and bade one of the waiters tell that gentleman to come to her.

The confounded look in the Beauty's face, the rage, vexation, disappointment, was something to see.

"You here!" he said, "what do you want? I won't have this. Now, just go back. I won't go with you."

"What does all this wickedness mean?" she said, with almost solemnity in her voice, "I heard you give some directions about a trunk."

"Yes, always spying on me. What if I did? I'll do as I like now. I am sick of the whole business!"

He was trembling with excitement. Yet still, though she saw now the unutterable depths to which his folly was leading him—folly still, though on the verge of being converted into wickedness — she wished to save him, to preserve their dignity, before the house, and before her mother. She would not even pretend to see what his purpose had been. Such delicacy for their mutual interest had this young girl.

"Ah! come home at once," she

said. "Give up all this folly. Say goodbye to her, and let her go."

"I don't want you here. I wish you would leave me alone. Such work and fuss as it is, following me about in this way. I can't go up to London, without having you all after me in this way. I tell you, I won't have it."

"And do you tell me," said she, "that you will leave this with —? You cannot, you dare not!"

"Dare not? What do you mean? Now, just go away. I won't have this sort of thing. Pursuing me up to London as if I were a child!"

"Come, come, dear papa, come home with me—with us."

"With *us?*"

"Yes; mamma is waiting outside. She was determined to come up here."

The face of the Beauty flushed up. He felt himself a miserable, degraded, hunted, persecuted man. All this was childish, undignified, and he would not "put up with it."

"Just go away," he repeated; "I don't want you here; I won't have it."

"But mamma? O, poor mamma, she is so ill, and waiting there outside! Yes."

"Waiting there outside? O, this is unendurable. How *dare* you do this? It is uncalled for—and I don't choose it—and I won't have it; so I command you to go away and leave me."

"No, father," she answered, calmly, and even sternly; "I remain here—and she shall remain too."

He was thunderstruck at this firm tone. A waiter entered here and said—

"Please, sir, Mrs. Labouchere wishes to see you up stairs; she is waiting."

It was a terrible situation.

"Now," she said, and her nerves and firm purpose were all strung with a sort of supernatural strength, "now, papa, there is no time for compromise or hesitation. We are at arms' length, and I will not see my poor sweet treasure, who is at the door, perish through your unkindness. What do you wish? Will you come away with us, and say goodbye to this woman; or if you do not, do you choose a scene here—to be disgraced before the house, to be exposed in this undignified

position? Say, at once, which you prefer?"

The Beauty was speechless at this arrogant defiance. He was enraged at being thus checked by a mere foolish girl. But what was he to do? Beside himself with anger, he turned round suddenly, and left the room.

There was triumph in Livy's eyes. She paused a moment to collect her thoughts, then hurried from the room, and ran to her mother waiting outside.

"Dearest," she said, eagerly, "promise me this; everything will go well, if you only leave it to me; put all into my hands—oh, you must, you shall; you must not interfere; but just go away to the station, and wait for me. Oh, do this, and all shall be well. Fly from him!"

"Never; so long as I live I shall never do that?"

"You must—it is the only thing I ever asked of you. It is not flying from her. I am a match for her. Leave all to me. There! there, coachman," and she bade him drive away to the station with unspeakable relief; she saw that her mother made no further protest, and then she hurried back into the room. She found Mrs. Labouchere, in travelling dress, waiting there.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CRISIS.

THAT lady's face was contorted with anger, so as almost to look ugly. She stamped her foot as Livy, with flushed cheek, came running in.

"So you have come again. I am sorry I have no time to wait and see you. Mr. Talbot is going to see me on my journey. We have very little time to lose."

"You can go, then," said Livy, with a tremulous voice. "I do not detain you."

"I know that. You would scarcely

venture to interfere with my movements. Things have not gone quite so far as that."

"They have gone far enough," said Livy; "but it must stop here."

"That is as it may be. Then what is the object of your visit at this extraordinary hour?"

"I wish my father to escort me back."

"I am afraid," said the lady, looking at him with a doubtful smile; "perhaps he will not receive his orders from you, or obey, and return to school?"

"I have had enough of this," he said, impatiently, "and won't be interfered with. I command you to go home at once. I shall see Mrs. Labouchere to the train."

"Then I shall wait for you here."

"I am not returning here. Stand out of the way," he added, roughly.

"No, he won't return here to-night," said Mrs. Labouchere, meaningly. "However, observe I have nothing to do with his movements. Whatever good-natured offices he performs for me, they are all spontaneous, I assure you."

"It is very disinterested of him," said Livy, her voice trembling; "and very spontaneous of him, considering the picture you have drawn of him in letters to your friends. Poor unfortunate papa! nothing will open his eyes."

"How dare you? I won't have this. It was a forgery; and never referred to me. So much for your spite, and this

conspiracy. I never believed a word of it, Mrs. Labouchere; and you made it as clear as light to me."

"Oh, *that* is the explanation," said Livy, turning to her enemy in triumph. "So you stoop to *that*—to deny your own handwriting; well, all through I gave you credit for ingenuousness that was above board; but I did not think you would descend to that meanness."

The other was much confused and colouring.

"I never *did* deny it; but I said that there was a conspiracy to set everything in the worst light."

"Yes," he added, supporting her eagerly; "and that it applied to quite another thing—I understand you."

"But let us understand clearly *now*.

Surely, I—we — saw the words with *his* name: it made my cheeks tingle as I read. Surely, there could be no mistake in *that.* Do you deny it?"

"Of course she does," he said, eagerly. "You know nothing about the matter."

"I do not deny it! and never did!" she said, fiercely. "No one shall accuse me of untruth. I own it here before him — make what you like of it."

"Ah! you hear, father."

He faltered, and looked at Mrs. Labouchere.

"Then what did it mean? You told me——"

"Never. *I* did not wish to hurt you—nor do I now, dear Mr. Talbot.

I will explain all these things to you by and by. Come, come, now," said the siren, putting on a most seductive and enchanting smile. "Come with me. You will not desert me in the face of calumny—I can count on you at this last moment."

A waiter entered now, and disturbed this curious and unmelodious trio that was going on. The infatuated Beauty gave way at once.

"Yes, I am ready!" he exclaimed.

The young girl gave a cry, and placed herself before the door.

She stood between them and the door, and the spirit of determination which filled her face, gave her quite the air of a heroine suited for painting or sculpture.

"You can leave this room if you like,

but I warn you there shall be a scene here—in the hall—before the house—before the world! You can go to the railway station, if you wish; I do not hinder you. But again I warn you. I will follow you there, and shall find a way to expose you. I know that she —*you* will not care for such an exposure; but *you* will, papa. You have delicacy, and sensitiveness, and decency, and will not allow this lady to expose you in such a way."

Mrs.. Labouchere looked at her with an expression of baffled rage and fury. She stamped her foot.

"Are you her father? Do you put up with this language? and do you allow me to be spoken to in this fashion —to be insulted? Are you so weak that you cannot assert your power over

a girl of her sort? This is a pretty exhibition indeed for me to be treated to. I wish to pass out—I shall be late."

"You can go if you will. So can he," said the young girl, suddenly giving way and throwing the door open. "But mark — he knows me, and that I have never shrunk from doing all that I say. Leave that hall with him, and I call on the people of the hotel, and tell them my story. That I am his daughter — that *you* are——"

She stopped. Mrs. Labouchere looked furious. The Beauty was pale with anger, irresolution, and terror. He knew not what to do. He was cowed before his own child. He was not quite pleased either by the tone of the

lady, whose companion he had been, and for whom he had sacrificed so much. She had turned on him, with actually a sneer.

"I am afraid," she said, "you are hardly fitted for the rather responsible situation you have placed yourself in. Have you measured your own strength? At least, you should have done so, before taking up such a position. A man should learn to control his own household first. Still, your daughter meant no such low, vulgar scene as she seems to threaten me with. Such may suit a certain class, but not me at all. But this is what I do. I call upon you—at least you can do this—to take care that I am not exposed to any exhibition of this sort. I require it from you—it is the least you can do!"

After all, this young girl, weak, powerless as she seemed, had brought them into this dilemma. The Beauty, stung with mortification at the desertion -- hurt at being addressed in this way before his daughter, before whom he wished to keep up his pride—kept looking from one to the other. Then he made a desperate rally.

"I command you to go away, and to make no fuss. Do you hear me; you must obey me."

Livy never stirred, only shook her head and smiled.

"There is the door," she said, "it is open, I go on before you into the hall. But if he goes, I shall do what I say, as surely as there is a heaven above us."

"A good defiance and challenge,"

said the lady. "They can speak any way to you, in your own family. You cannot do it," she added, pityingly, "the leopard cannot change his spots. You had better submit."

"But she *shall* submit. I am not going to be treated in this way. Let her do it if she dare. Come Mrs. Labouchere, you shall see."

He offered his arm. Livy turned pale, her heart misgave her.

But help came, and at that moment the door was opened, and a servant entered, saying—

"Mrs. Talbot is waiting, sir, and wishes to see you."

CHAPTER XIX.

FINALE.

In a moment that pale face and worn figure stood before them, in the doorway.

Mrs. Labouchere stamped on the ground impatiently.

"You are but a clumsy workman," she said to him in a low voice. "This is clearly not your department. Take my advice and return to your old domestic habits. It will be the wisest thing you can do. Dear me! What an invasion, the whole family come to see me off!"

"Going away, are you, going away," said Mrs. Talbot. "Thank God!"

"Oh! now, no scene or confusion! I beg for that. All I want is to get to my continental train without any confusion, before the people of the house. I will withdraw—retire—will do anything so as to keep up my credit as a lady with the people of the house. Any family scenes or things of that sort I have not been accustomed to. *Indeed*, the game is not worth the candle."

The Beauty was utterly helpless, his head hanging down on his breast, not knowing what to do, and bitterly resenting these open sneers.

"The game is not worth the candle, of which I have already burnt too much in my life. I want all the waxlight I

can get. It is very precious. Ah, my dear Mr. Talbot, you do not know how to manage things. It is out of your line. Take my advice, as that of an old friend, don't meddle with these things in future. You have the awkward knack of blundering. See what a little meeting you have contrived here! Your daughter, wife, all gathered in my apartment, threatening to call in the people of the house, to raise some vulgar storm! Shocking! The situation you see is beyond your control. So now I advise you—go back quietly in honourable custody, be submissive, and the past will be perhaps condoned, and, above all, in future devote yourself to chronicling small beer, and to your old department, for which you are eminently——"

"How nasty; how unkind of you," said the Beauty, "to speak to me in this way. You have no heart, and they were right when they said so"

"Yes," said Mrs. Talbot, "We can see what she is now. Thank God for opening your eyes at last."

The lady burst out laughing.

"No heart, he says. Why surely you were not taking it all *au grand sérieux.* Surely you must have seen, Mr. Beauty Talbot, that I had something more than some pastime in view; something with which to fill up my hours. Whatever end I had in view, Mrs. Talbot, it has been carried out perfectly. I have succeeded."

"No," said Livy, looking at her steadily. "No, you have not."

"Take care," said the lady. "Do not try me too far. As it is, you do

not know what you have done. As you have chosen to take her place, and have put yourself forward, you have incurred a debt which I shall one day call on you to pay. I only wait a more convenient opportunity. Mind, I warn you. You have not done with Mrs. Labouchere yet!"

"Threaten my poor child!" said Mrs. Talbot aghast. "What has she done to you, you unscrupulous woman?"

"She knows very well," said the other fiercely. "Let her think of it. It will comfort her in all her approaching happiness. The sweet devoted daughter; the gentle creature who will, of course, have her reward in marrying the man of her choice. Yet my sister-in-law she will be after all! Think of that."

"I did you no harm. I was only protecting all that was most dear to me."

"You have dared to set yourself up against *me!* You, a poor child! But never fear! all in good time. I could have been content to have despised you all; had you let *me* alone. No; but *she* must insult us by open contempt of my father's honestly-got wealth, and of his origin, for which he was not accountable. That insolence drove me mad almost, and I vowed I would punish its author as she deserved—make her feel as much mortification as she inflicted on me. Was it genteel, lady-like, worthy of high birth? No matter. Let any one survey the whole party at this moment, and say which ought to have the most pride now."

She looked round on them all triumphantly. The picture was actually as she described it. For there was the fine lady, who at the beginning of this story had been so haughty and insolent to the *nouveau-riche* family, who had amused herself at those parties of Mr. Hardman, launching her little arrows into the neck of her victim, like the Spanish bullfighters; the grand lady sitting up enthroned, while they, the low-born, had to do homage before her—that miserable rebuff of the returned picture, which affected her more than anything; certainly, for all these outrages here was indemnity!

Enter now Mr. Motcombe (who was the Starridge of the day) in person.

"I am afraid, ma'am, you will be late. There are only twelve minutes to spare."

"Then I must go. Adieu! adieu, all round," she said, with her old sweet manner. "Remember," she said to Livy, "you shall hear of me again, I promise you that."

"I shall be ready, and shall reply," said Livy, firmly.

"Good-bye, Mr. Talbot, remember my good advice—sing your little song, the 'Last Eternal Smile,' was it not?" —even this distortion of the title of his famous song, hurt our Beauty as much as anything—"sing it at the little parties about; but never attempt any grand enterprise of this kind. You have not the stuff, the fearless gifts, to carry such a thing through. Adieu."

She was gone. The trio were left in that room together—a strangely humiliated party— the Beauty literally writhing with shame and mortification. He was not more than a boy—a boy of nearly forty or so—but still an untrained boy, whose education was actively going on, and would not be completed for the next dozen years. On this principle, perhaps, it might turn out a wholesome lesson for him.

Mrs. Talbot was humiliated too, but thankful. There was even a secret joy in her heart at the deliverance. She was a true woman; her enemy was gone; she had the field to herself; affection would do much still. She believed in that wonderful arm.

But for our Livy, what a deal there

was before her, as, indeed, she felt. It was the task, the heavy, up-hill task, of "reconstruction," as difficult as that American business; she would strive and labour at it, however, though there was nothing but ruins strewn about her.

How was she even to begin. She had no element in her favour. The Beauty was, indeed, softened to her purpose, annealed, judiciously cowed, ashamed of himself; and over him, besides, there was a sort of trepidation and uneasiness, which her quick eye detected, and detected with a sort of joy.

That night, when her mother was above stairs, lying down, wearied, ill, yet still calm, and tranquil, Livy was below with her father.

This uneasiness was strong upon him.

"We must never go back on this night, father," she said, with that new, steady manner which had come on her within these latter days, and made him uncomfortable. "The whole of this night's business — would to heaven it could be dropped out of our lives! Still, we need never think of it again. And I promise you this, dear papa, I shall school myself to forget it even, provided that you do your best to make me forget it."

His eyes fell upon the ground. Then he said eagerly,

"She was a wicked, cruel, spiteful creature; and—"

"Hush," said Livy; "that is not the way to look at it. Poor mamma,

who has suffered so much, she must never be let to think of this night either. It is humiliating for us all; but for *her*—." She paused. "And if you were only kind and attentive, and tried to do your best, then this night would be forgotten."

He understood her. It was a sort of bargain. He felt that he had re-entered his old servitude, but with a mistress of more mental power. But he was in truth heartily ashamed. He could not bring himself to think of the degradation he had gone through; his public mortification; and, above all, to think that he had been on the verge of——. His sense of humiliation was so great, that he began presently to persuade himself he never seriously *meant* to carry out such a thing;

it was a mere thought, born of irritation. Still, when he saw his daughter's calm eyes fixed upon him, he was relieved that it was to be heard of no more: he was grateful for the forbearance, and he knew her well enough to believe that she would loyally, honourably, and fairly carry it out.

And so she did.

From that night a new life began for them all. She stepped into that place which her mother had filled, and filled so indiscreetly heretofore. That abdication was cheerfully accorded. In vain came young Mr. Hardman, her lover and slave, filled with a fresh admiration of her gifts and charms, to beg that she would think of him now.

Her answer always was,—

"You must wait. If you are content

to do this, I can love you. But I have duties here more sacred. Later on we shall think of each other."

And so he was content to wait, and did wait very long and very patiently.

Meanwhile, the Beauty goes back slowly into his old life, and sings his little songs about. Indeed, he is a great "composer" now—*i.e.*, has got a hold of a certain public—writing under the name of "SILVIO." D'Alberg and Cocker actually publish a long list of these sweetly sentimental things, which the fashionable music-masters in London and Brighton teach their young ladies to warble, and which are of this style and description:—Songs by Silvio: "He gave one last and lingering smile" (second thousand), words by Annabel; "The Swallow;"

"Her hand in mine," words by Fides; "His eye was soft, his voice was sweet" (second thousand), words by Fides, with many others. "Fides" and "Annabel" were ladies of his acquaintance who admired him. Our Livy forwarded these little pursuits as very harmless and useful, worked hard at revising them, for they outraged the laws of harmony barbarously, and her energy got them published. She had a strange influence over him, possibly owing to that little secret which was between father and daughter.

That secret Mrs. Talbot, growing fresh and fair again, from good health and good spirits, never so much as dreamed of. To the day of her death she shall never know it. Indeed the Beauty behaves very well on the whole.

He has his little harmless flirtations now and again, at which Mrs. Talbot smiles. He is indeed not a little disturbed by one thing, which positively weighs on his spirits and depresses him. He feels he is getting *fat!* He is horror-stricken at a sort of gentle incline, and is going to take meal biscuits at breakfast, bran cakes, and the like, which he hears is better than Mr. Banting's famous regimen. This, with the songs, engages his chief attention.

Mrs. Labouchere is in exile. No one hears of her, or has heard. Mr. Hardman is going to get into Parliament. Old Dick Lumley is still alive, and "capering" down to "dear Lady Towler's," or up again from the "Duke's." These various characters go on their old way. In truth their

story is but incomplete. Mrs. Labouchere is certainly one of those of whom people say, "That woman has a history." Such a one must certainly work out a history for herself of some kind. What that history is, may be traced on another occasion. She certainly was not likely to forget those last words she addressed to Livy; nor was she ever likely to forgive that young girl.

THE END.